



## The Securitization of Migration in Hungary through Conspiracy Theories

### Macaristan'da Göçün Komplo Teorileri Aracılığıyla Güvenlikleştirilmesi

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#### ARTICLE INFO

<i>Article History</i>	
Received	1 May 2024
Accepted	28 June 2024
Available Online	9 August 2024
Article Type	Research Article

#### Keywords

Viktor Orbán,  
Populism,  
Conspiracy Theories,  
Securitization,  
Illegal Migration.

#### ABSTRACT

This study examines the securitization of migration in Hungary and its connection to conspiracy theories and populist rhetoric. The Copenhagen School's concept of securitization suggests that security issues are constructed through discourse, where certain topics are elevated to existential threats, justifying extraordinary measures. In Hungary, the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has framed migration as a significant threat to Hungarian identity, culture, and values. This framing frequently relies on conspiracy theories, such as the Great Replacement and Eurabia, which claim that there is a deliberate plan to alter the demographic and cultural makeup of Europe. The study analyses Orbán's speeches and the policies his government has implemented, demonstrating a pattern where migration is portrayed as a severe danger, legitimizing strict responses such as border fences, anti-migrant legislation, and the targeting of institutions associated with liberal ideals. These securitization processes resonate with populist ideologies that create a dichotomy between "us" and "them," fostering division and fear. To understand these processes the article defines securitization, the interplay between conspiracy theories and populist style of politics and examines the Eurabia and Great Replacement conspiracy theories and the speeches of Orbán.

#### MAKALE BİLGİSİ

<i>Makale Geçmişi</i>	
Başvuru	1 Mayıs 2024
Kabul	28 Haziran 2024
Yayın	9 Ağustos 2024
Makale Türü	Araştırma Makalesi

#### Anahtar Kelimeler

Viktor Orbán,  
Popülizm,  
Komplo Teorileri,  
Güvenlikleştirme,  
Yasadışı Göç.

#### ÖZ

Bu çalışma Macaristan'da göçün güvenlikleştirilmesini ve bunun komplo teorileri ve popülist retorikle bağlantısını incelemektedir. Kopenhag Okulu'nun güvenlikleştirme kavramı, güvenlik sorunlarının söylem yoluyla inşa edildiğini ve belirli konuların olağanüstü önlemleri haklı çıkaracak şekilde varoluşsal tehditlere dönüştürüldüğünü öne sürmektedir. Macaristan'da Başbakan Viktor Orbán hükümeti, göçü, Macar kimliği, kültürü ve değerlerine yönelik önemli bir tehdit olarak çerçevelemiştir. Bu çerçeveleme sıklıkla, Avrupa'nın demografik ve kültürel yapısını değiştirmeye yönelik kasıtlı bir plan olduğunu iddia eden Büyük Yer Değiştirme ve Eurabia gibi komplo teorilerine dayanmaktadır. Çalışma, Orbán hükümetinin uyguladığı politikaları analiz ederek, göçün ciddi bir tehlike olarak tasvir edildiği, sınır tel örgüleri, göçmen karşıtı yasalar ve liberal ideallerle ilişkili kurumların hedef alınması gibi katı tepkileri meşrulaştıran bir model ortaya koymaktadır. Bu güvenlikleştirme süreçleri, "biz" ve "onlar" arasında bir ikilik yaratarak bölünmeyi ve korkuyu besleyen popülist ideolojilerle örtüşmektedir. Bu süreçleri anlamak için makalede güvenlikleştirme, komplo teorileri ve popülist siyaset tarzı arasındaki etkileşim tanımlanmakta ve Eurabia ve Büyük Yer Değiştirme komplo teorileri ile Orbán'ın konuşmaları incelenmektedir.

#### 1. Introduction

There is a discernible link between the terrorist attack perpetrated by Anders Behring Breivik in 2011 on Utøya Island, which targeted Marxist groups and resulted in the deaths of 77 individuals, and the terrorist attack carried out by Brenton Tarrant in 2019 on a mosque and an Islamic center in Christchurch, which resulted in the deaths of 17 individuals. Furthermore, there is a correlation between Breivik and Tarrant's attacks and the terrorist attacks on the Poway Synagogue and a supermarket in El Paso, USA,

which occurred in 2019. The perpetrators of these terrorist attacks referenced the Great Replacement or Eurabia conspiracy theories in their manifestos, which were published before the attacks. While Breivik frequently mentioned Eurabia in his manifesto, which was over 1,500 pages long, Tarrant's manifesto was entitled "Great Replacement." Similarly, terrorists in the United States also reproduced Tarrant's and Breivik's thoughts in their manifestos. These attacks, which can be demonstrated as examples of far-right terrorism, serve as examples of how

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they were radicalized by conspiratorial thinking (Yukaruç, 2022). It is evident that conspiracy theories can be associated with radicalization. However, the primary objective of this article is to illustrate how conspiracy theories can evolve into an effective narrative in populist politics and contribute to the securitization of specific issues.

In the field of critical security studies, the Copenhagen School has fundamentally altered traditional approaches to security by demonstrating that security issues are not inherent but are constructed through discourse. With this school of thought, security studies have moved beyond the traditional military and economic security themes and begun to examine the social, political, and environmental dimensions related to security. The securitization approach focuses on the ability of discourses to make certain events relevant to security. As this study demonstrates, migration is one of the securitized issues. In some cases, it may be securitized even when it is not directly related to security.

One of the questions this article seeks to answer is whether anti-immigrant conspiratorial narratives have an impact on securitization processes. The two popular conspiracy theories mentioned above, the Great Replacement and Eurabia conspiracy theories, are directly related to migration and are frequently used in the discourse of politicians in Europe. The Arabization of Europe through migration and the alleged deliberate Arabization of Europe, especially by European institutions, creates a narrative in which the European population is under threat. These theories have also become popular in Hungary and have been used by the populist party Fidesz in its policy-making discourse. For this reason, Hungary has been selected as a case study in this study. Another point that makes Fidesz important for this study is that it is a populist party in a position to apply securitization practices.

In this study, the immigration policies of the Fidesz government in Hungary will be analyzed, with the focus on discourses and narratives. As discourses play a pivotal role in securitization theory, the discourse and narrative constructed by Prime Minister Orbán and Fidesz will be examined. The study will investigate whether the constructed narrative presents migration as an existential threat and whether Fidesz has implemented extraordinary measures to address this. Thus, this study aims to elucidate the role of conspiratorial narratives in securitization processes, with a particular focus on countries where populist governments are in power. To this end, it will first present a conceptual framework for understanding securitization, and then examine the relationship between populism and conspiracy theories, as well as the prevalence of two conspiracy theories popular in Europe: the Great Replacement and Eurabia conspiracy theories. Secondly, the paper will explain how the issue of migration has been politicized and securitized in Hungary through these conspiracy theories, analyzing Orbán's discourses in the last decade. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to illuminate the complex relationship between discourse, securitization, and populism, and how these factors shape the way migration is addressed in contemporary Hungary.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Securitization

The Copenhagen School, a significant contributor to critical security studies, differentiates itself from traditional security studies by claiming that actors construct both security problems and policies to address them (Watson, 2011). The contributors to this school differentiate themselves from traditional security studies by analyzing international security not only in military or economic terms but also in five categories: military, political, economic, social, and environmental (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998: pp. 22-23). In this section, I will focus on the social category, which refers to collective identities. Buzan, Waever and De Wilde (1998: pp. 22-23) propose that rival identities or migrants can become security issues due to societal changes being perceived as a direct threat to the 'real' identity of the society, which may result in a distraction from the collective identity. Consequently, actors may securitize societal concerns, such as illegal immigration, as evidenced by the Hungarian case.

Security is not limited to the current political situation, as this school argues, in which an issue (illegal migration) is seen as an existential threat to a valued reference object (Hungarian society, which will be analyzed in this section) and is constructed by many different important actors through discourses called speech-acts (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998: pp. 23-25; Brauch, 2008: p. 5). To combat this existential threat, exceptional measures are necessary and justified. The securitization process reinforces this message through the discourse of the securitizing actor.

According to this approach, meanings related to security are created by actors within discourses. In other words, security meanings are constructed through discourse. Discourses on security inform us about the 'other' that threatens our security and place 'us' in the opposite position of the other. Through these discourses, we can gain insight into the worldview of those in power, their perception of their place in the world, and their approach to security. This helps us to comprehend why they perceive certain issues as vital threats to security and why they believe urgent measures are necessary. Therefore, the discourse of Hungarian politicians can be understood in terms of their perception of Hungary's place in the world, their security concerns, and their views on refugees. In the following sections, I will analyze in detail how refugees are viewed as the 'other' and a threat to Hungarian identity.

The question of securitizing actors in the process of securitization is an important one. Those with power are typically viewed as securitizing actors, while others, such as the media, who assist in disseminating discourses, are seen as functional actors. In the context of migration, securitizing actors are collective identity holders who preserve and reproduce language, traditions, and ethnic purity (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde, 1998: p. 23). The success of a securitization process depends on identifying a threat and mobilizing an 'us' against a threatening 'them' (Karyotis and Patrikios, 2010: p. 44). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the role of Hungarian politicians in shaping threat discourses and creating an 'us' versus 'them' dynamic. According to the Copenhagen School, anyone in society can be a securitizing actor, but political and military elites have

an advantage due to their easier access to information and social capital. By highlighting their agency in this process, we can better understand the dynamics of exclusion and 'othering' in society. This study focuses on Hungarian politicians as securitizing actors. To understand Victor Orbán's discourses on illegal migration, it is crucial to analyze the policies of populist movements towards 'us' and 'the other'.

The process of securitization suggests that security has become politicized (Bilgin, 2010: p. 83). This is because, according to this perspective, events or objects do not inherently constitute problems, but rather securitizing actors choose to frame them as such through their discourses (Bilgin, 2010: p. 83). By framing events as security issues through an intersubjective process, urgent and exceptional measures can be taken that would not be possible otherwise (Bilgin, 2010: p. 83). In summary, securitization involves three stages: initially, the security issue is not within the policy domain; then, it becomes politicized and enters the social agenda; finally, it is presented as an existential threat and is securitized. To address this existential threat, it is established through discourse that exceptional measures must be taken. These measures are legitimized by the securitizing actor. This study will examine how Orbán, as a populist politician, has politicized and then securitized the issue of immigration through the use of conspiratorial discourses or conspiracy narratives. In order to contextualize this analysis, it will be necessary to first consider the connection between populist politics and conspiracy theories.

## 2.2. Populism and Conspiracy Theories

In recent years, populism has been defined as a political logic that conceives of a society dominated by antagonism between two groups struggling for hegemony (Laclau, 2005); a particular discourse used by political leaders to express their position (Hawkins, 2010); a style and therefore a particular performance of policy-making (Moffitt, 2016); "unpolitics" (Taggart, 2018) due to its focus on popular sovereignty and its disregard for all other aspects of democracy; a communication phenomenon targeting interactions between political actors, media and ordinary citizens (de Vreese et al., 2018); or an ideology (thin ideology) (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). These various approaches to populism are not mutually exclusive and can even complement each other. They tend to converge in identifying four key elements: 1. the existence of two groups, the society and the elites; 2. the opposition between these two groups; 3. the celebration of popular sovereignty; 4. the moral glorification of the commoners and criticism of the elites (Woods, 2014: p. 11).

Subsequently, populist politicians espouse a simplistic worldview, delineating societal structures into two distinct categories: the elite and the people. This perspective postulates that the general public is frequently unaware of the machinations of malevolent forces that exploit them. Populist leaders are perceived as indispensable in alerting the public to the stark reality of their circumstances. Populism is a moralizing approach to politics that emphasizes the dichotomy between elites and the people, with processes of marginalization being of central importance (Wodak, 2015; Müller, 2016). It is a struggle between the 'good' and the 'evil'.

Populist leaders tend to dramatize and simplify issues to trigger an emotional response. Right-wing populist parties, in particular, use provocative rhetoric to attract attention and encourage polarization (Moffitt, 2016). Today's social media and post-truth politics provide a favorable environment for this communication style. According to Ruth Wodak (2015), right-wing populist parties instill a specific type of fear, particularly regarding immigration. This fear comprises several elements, including the fear of job loss to immigrants, the undermining of the welfare state by immigrants, the increasing powerlessness of the nation-state to protect the intra-national public, and the erosion of values, traditions, and local culture. Conspiracy theories are also part of this rhetoric constructed by right-wing populist parties (Wodak, 2015). Fenster (2008) argues that all conspiracy theories are populist, while Taggart (2018) notes the frequency with which populist parties use them.

Populist discourses, then, often establish antagonistic positions between the people and the other, the weak and the strong. The morally good and oppressed people are placed at the center, while malevolent, powerful, and wealthy actors with secret plans are positioned in opposition. These actors may be elites, the establishment, an ethnic or religious group, or undefined 'external forces'. Populism therefore unites people through discourse around a new identity. Conspiracy theories can indirectly support populist movements by using discourse or narrative to rally people against an imaginary group of malevolent forces, positioning themselves as defenders of 'the people' (Yablokov, 2014: p. 625). This makes them a functional tool in the goal of dividing the public into two groups.

When examining the last few decades, it is evident that populist movements have emerged in several European countries, including Italy, the Netherlands, France, Austria and Germany. These movements share common characteristics, including opposition to the EU, anti-immigration views, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-establishment views. Norbert Hofer, a former presidential candidate from the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), frequently uses conspiracy theories. For instance, he accused his opponent in the presidential race of having the support of Freemasons with Jewish influence, which some consider to be a secret organization (Faiola, 2016). In 2015, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the French far-right populist National Rally (formerly known as the National Front), claimed to a Russian newspaper that Western intelligence was behind the terrorist attacks in Paris (Lichfield, 2015). In a more recent example, conspiracy theories about the coronavirus that emerged in 2019 have been circulating. Matteo Salvini, the leader of the far-right League Party, and Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the Brothers of Italy Party, shared a conspiracy theory on their social media accounts that the virus was produced in a Chinese laboratory in 2015. This claim lacks scientific evidence and has been widely debunked by experts (Nardelli and D'urso, 2020).

However, this study will focus on two specific conspiracy theories: The theories of the Great Replacement and Eurabia are directly related to the phenomenon of immigration and have had an impact on many European countries, including Hungary. Conspiracy theories can create a division between 'us' and 'them' and marginalize perceived threats, similar to

the securitization process. This leads to conspiracy theories being an effective tool in the process of securitization, which leads to the same result. The following section analyses the frequent use of the Great Replacement and Eurabia theories in Hungary's political and social spheres. These theories have become part of political discourse and the securitization processes of the Orbán government. Before discussing their presence in Hungary, the emergence of these theories and their integration into European political discourse will be explored.

### 2.3. The Great Replacement and Eurabia Theories and Their Examples in European Political Discourses

The theory of Great Replacement gained popularity after Renaud Camus wrote a 40-page article on it in 2012. Camus is a writer, poet, and politician who, after being a socialist in his youth, began advocating far-right ideology after the Cold War. He was a candidate in the 2012 French Presidential Elections but decided to support Marine Le Pen when he failed to reach the required number of votes.

In his article, Camus (2012) argues that non-white immigrants from Africa and the Middle East are replacing the native white European population, which he believes will lead to the disappearance of the white race. Camus (2012: p. 24) highlighted the issue of Muslim immigration to Europe and the perceived higher birth rate of non-white populations compared to the whites. Camus also identified immigrants as an "other", but he also referred to some of them as 'collaborators'. He argued that Jews, women, homosexuals, secularists, advocates of freedom of thought, and politicians were part of this conspiracy of replacement (Camus, 2012: pp. 14-15). During the last French presidential elections, Camus publicly endorsed Eric Zemmour, a far-right candidate. Zemmour's entire campaign was based on the theory of the Great Replacement (Ganley, 2022). Given that Zemmour received only 7% of the votes, it may seem that his theory was not very effective. However, a study conducted by Camus suggests that over 60% of French people believe in this theory (Bullens, 2021).

The Generation Identity (GI) Movement, one of the most prominent far-right movements in Europe, also frequently employed this theory. The organization was founded in France in the last decade and it had branches in several European countries, including Italy, Austria, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Al Jazeera, 2018). With an estimated membership of thousands of activists and tens of thousands of online followers, the group aimed to protect what it perceives as the identity and culture of white Europeans (Al Jazeera, 2018). The organization's objective was to challenge the perceived negative effects of immigration and the 'great replacement', as well as Islamization (Beirich and Via, 2020).

The GI has its roots in the Identitarian movement, which originated in France after the Second World War and is currently experiencing a revival (Beirich and Via, 2020). The movement sees Europe's identity as white and Christian and uses a symbol representing the shields of the Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae, where the Europeans resisted a Persian army. Its main policy is 'back-migration', which involves the return of non-European immigrants to their home countries or the countries of their ancestors. It is worth

noting that the movement has been influenced by the work of Camus (Beirich and Via, 2020).

Another conspiracy theory that is frequently discussed is the so-called Eurabia Conspiracy Theory. This postulates that the European continent is undergoing a replacement by Muslim immigrants and shares significant similarities with the Great Replacement theory. The term 'Eurabia' was first used in the 1970s. It was further developed in the early 2000s by Gisèle Littman, an Egyptian-British writer who used the pseudonym Bat Ye'or (Daughter of the Nile). Since then, it has gained popularity in Europe. Bat Ye'or defined the term dhimmitude in Islamic civilizations as the subjugation of non-Muslims who accept the restrictive and humiliating subjection of an Islamic power in order to avoid slavery or death (Ye'or, 2005: p. 9). According to Bat Ye'or, this understanding is a result of the 1300-year-old understanding of jihad. According to her, throughout history, Byzantium or other European powers have attempted to counter the Muslim jihad. However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe's response has changed. The European Union (EU) institutions have demonstrated a tendency to abandon independence, particularly in the context of resistance to dhimmitude and the integration of North Africa and the Middle East into the Islamic world. The three most prominent indications of this fundamental shift in European policy are the officially supported anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism, and 'Palestinianism'. These increasingly visible aspects of European politics are only parts of an overall vision for the transformation of Europe. The new geopolitical entity has been named Eurabia. According to a newspaper interview, she argued: " We are now heading towards a total change in Europe, which will be more and more Islamicised and will become a political satellite of the Arab and Muslim world" (Brown, 2019).

Theories such as the Great Replacement and Eurabia have not only persisted in the academic literature, but have also served as the foundation for European far-right political parties and social movements which have recently begun to gain electoral success (Hernández Aguilar, 2024). Examples of such parties and movements include the Party of Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, *Le Rassemblement National* (RV) in France, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), and Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA) as a social movement.

In addition to these parties and movements, in 2007, a conference was organized by the Belgian right-wing populist party *Vlaams Belang*. The conference brought together several Eurabia ideologues, including historian and author Bat Ye'or, who was instrumental in popularizing Eurabia Theory. The purpose of the conference was to discuss how the theory could be transformed into a movement (Brown, 2019). In March 2019, Dries Van Langenhove, a Flemish nationalist from the *Vlaams Belang* party, claimed on social media that the Flemish people in Belgium were being replaced, supporting the Great Replacement theory.

The 2010 election manifesto of the PVV in the Netherlands includes the following statement: "the multicultural super state which has Brussels as its capital—the empire that wants to impose even more Islam on us in order to take away every memory of an independent and recognizable Netherlands...Europe is rapidly becoming Eurabia"

(Damhuis, 2019). Geert Wilders' anti-Islamic and accusatory statements against the European Parliament suggest that he is influenced by the Great Displacement Theory (Halhalli, 2023). However, it cannot be concluded that these statements are part of the securitization process, as these parties do not hold decision-making positions in the government. This text examines how the Fidesz Party, led by Viktor Orbán, approaches securitization, particularly in relation to the issue of migration. The party has been in government for many years and is often described as illiberal or right-wing populist. The next section will explore how the party uses these conspiracy theories to securitize the issue of immigration.

### 3. Fidesz, Conspiracy Theories and Securitization

As previously mentioned, Hungary's significance in the context of the influence of conspiracy theories on securitization lies in its political will to complete the process. While some political actors in other countries have politicized the issue of migration due to conspiracy theories, it is crucial to take extraordinary measures to ensure the securitization process. Fidesz in Hungary is the actor responsible for taking these measures. That's why this section is going to analyze the discourses and policies of the Fidesz Party and how these relate to conspiracy theories.

Examining the political ideology of the Fidesz Party during the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, it can be argued that while it implemented some populist policies, its focus was primarily on anti-communist conservatism rather than nationalism (Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021: p. 688). Although it initially adopted this approach to broaden its appeal, it increasingly pursued a more populist agenda, particularly after 2010 (Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021: p. 688). In the 2010 elections, Fidesz enjoyed great success, increasing its number of MPs by 86 and taking the title of the largest party in Parliament from the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), which came closest with 59 MPs (Levy, 2010). After the 2010 election, Orbán, whose power had substantially increased, amended the electoral law, exerting legal control over political parties, and modified the constitution to grant himself emergency powers (Özer et al., 2023: p. 944). In an effort to increase his power, Orbán established the Media Council and attached it directly to himself. This move allowed him to create a media environment in which he can directly influence half of the broadcasting organizations, fine opposition media outlets, and prevent diversity (Özer et al., 2023: p. 944). Thanks to its legal and media power, Fidesz has been able to politicize and securitize certain issues.

Fidesz frequently exploits the issue of illegal immigration in its discourse and has produced policies on it since 2015. Prior to this date, immigration was not a significant concern due to the homogenized Hungarian population. There was only a small number of non-Hungarian immigrants, consisting mainly of those who fled Ceausescu's regime or the wars in the Balkans during the 1990s (Bocskor, 2018: p. 553). In addition, opinion surveys conducted prior to 2015 revealed that Hungarians have xenophobic attitudes towards ethnic groups outside of Hungary and towards Roma within Hungary, and that they reject groups that do not fit their definition of an "ideal Hungarian", e.g. homeless people and LGBTQ+ people (Bocskor, 2018: p. 554). Bocskor (2018: p. 555) explains that migration has become significant for

Hungarians due to two reasons. Firstly, economic inadequacies have caused anxiety. Secondly, the 'framing theory' is employed, which involves selecting only a certain part of reality to support the causal and moral interpretation of the existing problem and the proposed solution. It is also important for a political framework to appeal to emotions, and conspiracy theories are also effective in creating this effect. The conspiracy theories often used by the Fidesz-controlled media politicize the migration issue by spreading fear that an external element (immigrants and people or institutions who want them to integrate into Hungarian society) is in a plot against internal elements (the public, Hungarian identity). Therefore, this section will focus on how the conspiracy theories mentioned above became part of the Hungarian political agenda, how the issue of migration was politicized by them and how they led to securitization through the taking of extraordinary measures.

In 2016, Orbán expressed his strong views on immigration. During his speech, he claimed that certain groups were hindering the free expression of opinions on migrants. He stated the following about migration:

“It is forbidden to say that immigration brings crime and terrorism to our countries. It is forbidden to say that the masses of people coming from different civilisations pose a threat to our way of life, our culture, our customs, and our Christian traditions... It is forbidden to say that in Brussels they are constructing schemes to transport foreigners here as quickly as possible and to settle them here among us. It is forbidden to say that the purpose of settling these people here is to redraw the religious and cultural map of Europe and to reconfigure its ethnic foundations, thereby eliminating nation states, which are the last obstacle to the international movement” (Orbán, 2016).

Analyzing Orbán's speech, it can be concluded that he believes that immigrants are contributing to the rise of crime in Hungary and that they are a threat to European and Christian values. At the same time, it is evident that he asserts that these events are intentionally aligned with the plans of EU institutions to undermine the ethnic and cultural identity of Europe by weakening nation-states. He reiterated this rhetoric in his other speeches. For example, in 2017, he stated:

“People who believe that Europe needs external borders that can be physically protected have been branded as closed-minded. Those who believe that immigration poses a threat to our culture have been branded as racists, and those who have spoken up for the protection of Christianity have been branded as exclusionists. Those who have stood up for the protection of families have been branded as homophobes. Those who believe that Europe is an alliance of nations have been branded as Nazis” (Orbán, 2017a).

Also, this rhetoric can be seen in his 2018 speech as well. Orbán stated that countries that do not control immigration at their borders are at risk of being consumed. External forces and international powers are attempting to impose this upon the Hungarian people, with the assistance of their allies within Hungary (Orbán, 2018a). In recent years, he has continued to use that rhetoric in his speeches, and it continues to have relevance today. For instance, in his 2023

speech, where he mentioned George Soros, a Hungarian philanthropist of Jewish descent whom he had previously criticized, he referred to him as a key figure in the international movement promoting immigration to Hungary:

“If George Soros had not attacked Hungary, if he had not announced his program to resettle millions of illegal immigrants in Europe with the help of his mercenary NGOs, we would never have made it onto the world’s front pages. But Uncle Georgie announced his resettlement program. He mobilized his NGO army and set about implementing his grand plan. They flooded the Balkans with illegal migrants and built a people-smuggling route leading into the heart of Europe” (Orbán, 2023).

Therefore, it can be stated that immigration remains a frequent topic in Orbán's political discourse. Waterbury (2020) notes that in Hungary, such rhetoric has been used to foment fear of a white and non-Christian future, even as migration declines, often combined with conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement. Accordingly, this article will focus not only on immigration but also on how immigration and the two conspiracy theories mentioned earlier play a role in securitization. In Hungary, these theories are often linked to immigration and George Soros. As a result, Soros-related discourses have contributed to the politicization and securitization of the immigration issue.

Both the Great Replacement Theory and the Eurabia Theory are prominent in the Hungarian case. Zack Beauchamp (2022) reports that the Great Replacement Theory is widely accepted in Hungary and has become almost an official state ideology. Indeed, Orbán has frequently referred to both Eurabia and the Great Replacement theories in his discourse over the past decade. Orbán stated that “Part of the picture of the decade of war facing us will be recurring waves of suicidal policy in the Western world. One such suicide attempt that I see is the great European population replacement program, which seeks to replace the missing European Christian children with migrants, with adults arriving from other civilizations” (Beauchamp, 2022). In 2018, Orbán criticized Western leaders for allowing Islamic expansion and the decline of Christian culture, claiming that Hungary was the last bastion in the fight against the Islamization of the European continent (Boffey, 2018).

In an interview with a radio channel in 2017, Orbán mentioned Eurabia Theory by using the term. He said: “Countries now experimenting with the creation of Eurabia – or with the amalgamation of the remnants of Islamic and Christian culture – will now have to recognise that it’s not only the Prime Minister or members of the Hungarian government who don’t want to take part in such experiments, but that the Hungarian people have declared this in every form possible at every opportunity” (Orbán, 2017b).

In 2018, in another radio program, he mentioned again from Eurabia and he claimed that his opponents censor the media, conceal their actions, and cover up for those who act on their behalf, in an attempt to impose on society their hidden agenda for Eurabia, which ordinary people do not want (Orbán, 2018b). In 2019, Orbán spoke at the 3rd Budapest Demographic Summit and said:

“If in the future Europe is to be populated by people other than Europeans, and we accept this as a fact and see it as natural, then we will effectively be consenting to population replacement: to a process in which the European population is replaced. This is not a subject for this conference, but in my view there are some in Europe who see this as the basis for policy: there are political forces which, for a variety of reasons, want to see population replacement” (Orbán, 2019).

These examples demonstrate that, according to Orbán's discourses, the migrant crisis in Hungary is attributed to a European Union-centered, liberal, anti-nation-state group. The group's aim is to alter the demographic structure of both Europe and Hungary, similar to the Eurabia or Great Replacement theories. By intentionally manipulating demographics, the group plans to change the culture, religion, or ethnic structure of Europe. Consequently, it represents a threat to Hungarian and European identity. In the context of the Copenhagen School and securitization, it is essential to consider identity as a pivotal factor. According to this approach, a threat to a society's identity is regarded as an existential problem, potentially leading to the implementation of extraordinary measures. This is evident in the case of Hungary. However, before delving into this topic, it is necessary to address the conspiracy theories surrounding George Soros, a critical figure in Hungary, as they are in connection with the above-mentioned subjects.

George Soros (or Soros György), a figure whose actions have been met with controversy in many countries, has been at the center of the debate on migration in Hungary, especially since 2017. He is a Hungarian Jew who moved first to the United Kingdom and then to the United States after the Second World War. With the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which he founded, he has endeavored to strengthen civil society, especially in Central and Eastern European countries after the Cold War, to democratize these countries and to establish a free-market economy in these countries (Plenta, 2020: p. 514; Langer, 2021: p. 164).

Nevertheless, in numerous post-Communist countries- and even in Türkiye (Küçükgöçmen and Solaker, 2022)-conspiracy theories have been propagated about Soros, and although there are numerous conspiracy theories, one common feature of these theories is the portrayal of George Soros as the epitome of malevolence. The narrative suggests that US-based international financial interests are engaged in a concerted effort to erode national sovereignty by interfering in national economies and politics via Soros's foundations (Pintilescu and Magyari, 2021: p. 208).

Hungary has been no exception. Conspiracy theories about Soros have persisted since the 1990s in Hungary. For example, in 1992, Hungarian far-right politician Istvan Csurka referred to Soros as a symbol of the Jews ruling the world (Langer, 2021: p. 165). The considerable financial resources at the disposal of George Soros have led to him becoming the focus of numerous conspiracy theories. Over the past three decades, he has invested more than \$12 billion in the democratization of Eastern Europe, with Hungary alone receiving over \$400 million in financial support since the 1980s (Pintilescu and Magyari, 2021: p. 212). Additionally, Soros established the Central European University in Budapest in 1991, facilitating the integration

of the academic community in Eastern Europe with the West.

However, particularly in the wake of the 2015 refugee influx, these theories have gained traction. Hungarian politicians have advanced the view that the refugees arriving from the Middle East are the result of a meticulously orchestrated plan, rather than the ordinary consequences of war and conflict (Langer, 2021: p. 165). This belief posits that the instigator of this grand plan was Soros, who, through his foundations, sought to Islamize or de-Christianize Europe (Langer, 2021: p. 165). At this juncture, Soros emerged as a pivotal figure in the conceptualization of the Eurabia theory or the Great Replacement theories, in the context of Hungary.

In 2017, the government of Viktor Orbán spent approximately \$250 million on a campaign targeting George Soros through various forms of media, including billboards, brochures, television advertisements, and mass mailings (Plenta, 2020: p. 522). Additionally, Orbán sent out letters requesting financial contributions from the public to support the fight against Soros's so-called migration plans (Plenta, 2020: p. 522). Right before 2018 elections, government efforts to discredit Soros continued and the Fidesz campaign showed images of Soros with leaders of the opposition parties while they were cutting border fences (Plenta, 2020: p. 522). In 2019, Orbán once again identified Soros as a key figure, stating that he was responsible for organizing illegal migration to Europe and that this was undermining European security and the security of Jewish life on the continent (Sherwood, 2019). Same year, Orbán's campaign in Europe targeted Soros and then-President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, presenting them in a photograph alongside the caption "You have the right to know what Brussels is cooking up!" (de Gruyter, 2024). This action not only implicated Soros in a perceived crisis, but also the European institutions.

In the final campaign of 2023, the Hungarian government once again utilized billboards, this time allocating spaces to George Soros's son, Alex Soros, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission (Spike, 2023). The billboards advised, "Let's not dance to their tune" (Spike, 2023). In 2024, Orbán still continues to use Soros discourse. For instance, recently he said: "We are fighting against an organized group which is called the Soros empire. The Soros empire was paying civil organizations to attack Hungary's legal system and carried out unlawful activities against Hungary. This is against us and about how to change Europe; and how to get rid of Christian, conservative, national political leaders and voters, and how to make them insignificant" (Orbán, 2024).

It can thus be posited that the Orbán regime has linked the conspiracy theories surrounding Eurabia and the Great Replacement to Soros and the European Union, thereby politicizing the matter of migration through a conspiratorial narrative. In this narrative, George Soros and immigration are presented as a threat to Hungarian identity, values, and lifestyle, with the implication that they pose an existential threat. This narrative is disseminated and reproduced by the media to a great extent in the public sphere. The narrative in question has also influenced Hungarian society, as evidenced by the findings of a 2020 study conducted by Political Capital Institute. According to this research, 49%

of the Hungarian people believe that "Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world" and "The anti-government protests in the past years were orchestrated and financially supported by George Soros" (Political Capital Institute, 2020). The percentages are even higher among supporters of Fidesz, with 75% of respondents indicating that they believe the first item mentioned above and more than 90% indicating that they believe the second item.

### 3.1 Soros Plan and Securitization

As previously stated, in order to securitize an issue, extraordinary measures must be taken. It is therefore necessary to examine how the Orbán government has securitized the issue of migration through conspiratorial rhetoric and what extraordinary measures it has taken. The most significant and pertinent development in the context of securitization, specifically in terms of security, is the erection of a substantial fence on the border with Serbia by Hungary following the 2015 migration crisis. This fence remains in place, even in the absence of the migration crisis, and has since undergone a transformation, becoming taller and equipped with surveillance cameras and electrification (CBC Radio, 2020). Furthermore, the fence has acquired a symbolic significance. As stated by Orbán, the fence symbolizes Hungary's determination against what is perceived as a "Muslim invasion" that threatens the Christian identity in Europe. While numerous countries have constructed similar border barriers, only Hungary appears to have made this a central aspect of its national security strategy (CBC Radio, 2020).

The second most significant indicator that these extraordinary measures have been implemented is the introduction of stringent new legislation on immigration. This new regulation, which is regarded as the strictest in the EU, is informally known as Stop-Soros plan. As a populist leader, Orbán has frequently organized referendums in the name of public consultation. The consultation on Soros was his seventh referendum since coming to power in 2010. In October 2017, a government-sponsored survey was sent to 4 million households. It included seven statements, such as the following: Soros wants to bring one million immigrants into EU countries, including Hungary, every year; Soros wants to open EU borders in favor of immigrants; Soros is working for lighter sentences for crimes committed by immigrants; Soros wants to facilitate the integration of immigrants by eliminating different European languages; or Soros is politically attacking countries that oppose immigration (About Hungary, 2017). The government spokesperson has stated that 2,356,811 people have returned to the consultation, while more than 2.3 million people have rejected the Soros Plan in all seven points. The spokesperson has further indicated that "The Hungarians reject all arguments, plans and attempts aimed at persuading Hungary to become an immigrant country. Accordingly, the government will continue to consistently reject all attempts to blackmail and threaten it into 'giving in' and submitting to Brussels' intentions" (Kovács, 2018).

Subsequently, in 2018, Hungary implemented legislative measures criminalizing assistance to illegal immigrants. The parliament subsequently approved penalties, including imprisonment, for individuals employed in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and for those aiding



immigrants (Dunai, 2018). In consequence of the enactment of this legislation, the OSF was compelled to transfer its regional office from Hungary to another country, and accordingly, it was relocated to Germany (Pintilescu and Magyari, 2021: p. 215). This legislation subjects NGOs that are involved in the field of immigration to national security controls and imposes a 25% tax on foreign funding that is allocated to these NGOs (Walker, 2018).

Third noteworthy development in the realm of securitization is the forced relocation of the Central European University (CEU), an institution founded and financed by George Soros. Following pressure from the Hungarian government, the CEU was compelled to leave the country and relocate to Vienna. In 2017, the Orbán government enacted amendments to the Hungarian Higher Education Act, which prohibited CEU from issuing both Hungarian and US diplomas and stipulated that it would be unable to enroll new students from 2018 if it did not comply with the 2017 amendments. Despite the Orbán government's assertion that the legislation was not directed at CEU, European institutions and American institutions, such as the US Embassy, believed that Orbán had enacted this law with the intention of targeting CEU because of his opposition to Soros (Bayer, 2017).

Finally, it is worth noting a few other extraordinary measures taken by the Orbán government in relation to illegal migration. For instance, in 2016, Orbán put the EU's migrant relocation plans to a referendum, and subsequently passed new laws that made it almost impossible for anyone in Hungary to claim refugee status legally (Bíró-Nagy, 2022: p. 411). Upon examination of these practices, it can be posited that the issue of migration, previously politicized by Eurabia, the Great Replacement and anti-Soros conspiracy theories, has been securitized by the implementation of extraordinary measures and the enactment of legal arrangements that would not be made under normal conditions. Furthermore, public opinion polls and consultations indicate that the Hungarian public approves of the policies of Fidesz. This suggests that conspiracy theories have been successful in the process of securitization.

#### 4. Conclusion

In Hungary, the topic of immigration continues to be a part of the same narrative with conspiracy theories. Immigration is still one of the most important parts of political discourse. Whereas previously national enemies such as Soros were seen as the cause of this migration wave, now international partners such as the EU have also been added to this plan. Soros, who was previously seen as an internal other, has now acquired a more international meaning.

The Fidesz government has undergone several stages in securitizing the issue of migration. Initially, it constructed a narrative that Hungary is under a migration invasion. To this end, it employed popular conspiracy theories such as Eurabia and the Great Replacement. Consequently, the issue of migration has become more closely associated with security than is actually the case, and it has gained greater visibility both in the social and political spheres. As a result, the issue has become politicized. Bíró-Nagy (2022: pp. 415-416) posits that immigration was not a significant concern for the Hungarian population before 2014. Only 18 per cent

of the population identified it as a significant issue in 2014. However, by 2015, this figure had risen to 68 per cent, 10 points above the EU average. It is noteworthy that while the percentage of the EU average decreased in the following years, the Hungarian average did not decrease accordingly. In 2018, it still remained at 56 per cent, while the EU average dropped to 29 per cent.

In Hungary, anti-Soros conspiracy theories are prevalent and intertwined with Eurabia and Great Replacement theories. In this narrative, Muslims have replaced Jews, who were previously marginalized in anti-Semitic theories and accused of corrupting European values. In Hungary, as in these theories, there was a belief that Christians were replaced by Muslims through some institutions. Indeed, Fidesz, which frequently employed these discourses in its political discourse, emerged triumphant in the 2018 General Elections and the 2019 European Elections, largely due to the efficacy of this narrative (Pintilescu and Magyari, 2021: p. 217).

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the Orbán government has employed the issue of migration and the related conspiracy theories to create a dichotomic discourse, exemplifying a populist style of politics. While migrants and related Soros, the European Union or other international organizations have been demonized and presented as the enemies of the Hungarian people, Orbán has constructed himself as a protector in order to preserve the historical Christian and European identity and values of the innocent Hungarian people. As the Hungarian electorate continued to re-elect him at subsequent elections, he consolidated his authority and effectively neutralized the issue of Muslim immigration, which he perceived as a threat to the Hungarian people, by securitizing it and implementing extraordinary measures.

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