



## Post-accession backsliding and European Union environmental policies

Aron Buzogány & Benedetta Cotta

To cite this article: Aron Buzogány & Benedetta Cotta (2022) Post-accession backsliding and European Union environmental policies, *Post-Communist Economies*, 34:5, 647-665, DOI: [10.1080/14631377.2021.1965361](https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2021.1965361)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2021.1965361>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 18 Aug 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1174



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)



# Post-accession backsliding and European Union environmental policies

Aron Buzogány <sup>a</sup> and Benedetta Cotta <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department Of Economics And Social Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (Boku), Environmental and Natural Resource Policy (Infer), Institute of Forest, Vienna, Austria; <sup>b</sup>Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Università Cà Foscari Venezia, Venice, Italy

## ABSTRACT

An environmental frontrunner in the Central and Eastern European regions since the late 1990s, Hungary followed a gradual but steady approximation progress to the EU environmental legislation. Previous research established an important role of the participation of economic and societal stakeholders in the decision-making and implementation process based on EU environmental legislation in Hungary. With the victory of the FIDESZ party in the parliamentary elections of 2010, the new government started to change the ‘rules of the game’ by nationalising infrastructures and weakening market access to foreign stakeholders. Focusing on the water and waste management sectors, the article analyzes the stages that brought Hungary to the recent governments’ policy changes. We argue that these changes have departed from the environmental policy practices established during the EU accession process and represent a challenge and a potential backsliding in the implementation of the EU environmental legislation in Hungary. Such changes in policy policies need to be seen in the context of the recent transformation of the political order and of the state–market relations in Hungary.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 April 2021  
Accepted 14 June 2021

## KEYWORDS

European union;  
europeanisation; public  
policy implementation;  
backsliding; populism;  
environmental policy;  
Hungary; waste policy; water  
policy; compliance

## 1. Introduction

After the Cold War the political and economic systems of the formerly communist countries underwent tectonic shifts in an extraordinarily short period of time. First, most of them have introduced democratic elections by the early 1990s. Second, they have also embraced – to varying degrees – market economic structures and free trade. These political and economic transitions in the region were paralleled, and indeed often preceded, by environmental transitions across the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Fagan, 2004; Gille, 2007; Pál, 2017; Pavlinek & Pickles, 2000). Most of these countries suffered from the socialist legacies associated with a number of challenges, such as low social and institutional trust, intolerance to migrants, higher corruption, specific trade links inherited from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, forced and intensive industrialisation, which created numerous environmental hotspots in the region (Auer, 2004; Turnock, 2001).

**CONTACT** Aron Buzogány  [aron.buzogany@boku.ac.at](mailto:aron.buzogany@boku.ac.at)  Department Of Economics And Social Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (Boku), Environmental and Natural Resource Policy (Infer), Institute of Forest, Vienna, Austria

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Democracies are often associated with better environmental performance due to the transparency and accountability of the government, lower corruption, but also due to different public behavioural patterns and public awareness associated with freedom of mass media, freedom of (environmental) movements, and non-governmental organisations, as well as decentralised polycentric system of governance (Barrett & Graddy, 2000; Jänicke, 1996; Libman & Obydenkova, 2014; Obydenkova et al., 2016; Ostrom, 2010, 2012; Payne, 1995; Shandra et al., 2012). The hope related to the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy and from central planning to market economy was that democratisation will lock-in policies that strengthen sustainable development and protect the environment.

While the relationship between sustainable development and democracy is a complex one (Barrett & Graddy, 2000; Carlitz & Povitkina, 2021; Midlarsky, 1998; Obydenkova & Salahodjaev, 2016, 2017; Payne, 1995; Povitkina, 2018; Shandra et al., 2012; Von Stein, forthcoming; Buzogány et al. 2019), in the case of the CEE states, the adaptation to democratisation, marketisation and better environmental rules took place at the same time and has been essentially driven by the accession process to the European Union (EU). This process was unique in that, for the first time, the EU dealt with candidates whose different economic, social, cultural and political features were palpably different than those that characterised the existing Member States (Poole, 2003). In light of these differences, the EU defined a number of conditions to guide the CEE candidates in the definition and implementation of the European *acquis communautaire* before formal accession to the EU. In brief, the CEE candidates were asked to align, transpose and harmonise their national legislation to that of the EU prior to their accession to the EU, with the Commission monitoring this process (Cotta, 2018).

The process of Europeanisation of the CEE countries through the EU's active and passive leverage played an important role in consolidating democracy and market economy in CEE (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Vachudová, 2005). The formidable presence of the EU's 'membership conditionality' (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005) made far-going expensive reforms through the promise of EU membership possible, facilitating democratisation and policy transfer not only in the CEE candidate countries but also in the EU's neighbourhood throughout the 2000s (Buzogány, 2016a; Lankina et al., 2016; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015; Obydenkova, 2012). The membership perspective allowed CEE policy-makers to take a long-term perspective and factor in future expectations about the benefits of being part of the common EU market. At the same time, the EU has also provided massive financial and technical support to make the harmonisation process for the accession states possible. This included not only making sure that the new member states were consolidated democracies and had functioning market economies when they became EU member states, but also that they had adopted the EU's *acquis communautaire*.

Comprising around three-hundred pieces of legislation, Chapter 22 of the EU's *acquis* concerned the substance of the European environmental policy. This policy comprises horizontal and sectoral rules while the main legal instruments are the directives which are binding only in the result, leaving to the Member States the freedom to choose implementation instruments (Ágh et al. 2007). Harmonising domestic environmental policies and regulatory styles with those of the EU was an extraordinarily costly and difficult exercise (Andonova, 2005; Carmin & VanDeveer, 2005; Cotta, 2018). One study assessing

the costs of harmonisation with the EU's environmental *acquis* in the CEE states has predicted that this would have absorbed several percentage points of their GDPs (Dimitrov, 2009). In order to cushion this burden, accession conditionality combined coercive pressure to adapt EU norms through screening and yearly monitoring of the progresses with capacity-building and legitimacy-enhancing environmental measures. Technical and financial assistance provided through EU financial programmes, such as PHARE, SAPARD or ISPA, offered additional incentives for CEE governments to pull EU environmental requirements down to the national level and to mitigate domestic resistance when it arose (Börzel and Buzogány 2010a and 2010b; Cotta, 2018).

Can regional integration – such as the one witnessed in the case of the CEE states' Europeanisation process – lock-in policy changes not only towards democracy and market economy but also towards high-quality environmental policies? Did pre-accession conditionality influence CEE states' behaviour after membership has been achieved? In this paper, we explore the environmental policies carried out in CEE, with the aim of shedding some light on the actors that drove or hindered the implementation of EU environmental policies in Hungary after the end of the 'accession conditionality'. The literature has highlighted the role of positive path dependencies established during the pre-accession period (Sedelmeier, 2012) and the availability of new resources such as structural funds, but also expertise which came with EU membership (Dimitrova and Buzogány 2014). The hope was that enforcement of EU legislation through infringement procedures initiated by the Commission would motivate member states to follow EU rules after accession. At the same time, others have maintained a more sceptical view on the prospects of post-accession compliance (Dimitrova, 2010). One of the arguments concerned the EU's weak oversight capacities while others expected a 'World-of-Dead-Letters' (Falkner & Treib, 2008) to emerge, or 'shallow compliance' (Dimitrova, 2010) to be supported by powerful coalitions of domestic actors willing to scale down compliance pressure.

While studies expected compliance problems in the CEE countries following full membership, researchers surprisingly recognised that the fears of compliance backslide were 'unfounded' (Epstein & Sedelmeier, 2008; Pollack, 2009, p. 2). Early assessments of formal compliance with EU legislation after accession have found surprisingly good compliance levels both on an overall level (Börzel & Sedelmeier, 2017; Knill & Tosun, 2009; Sedelmeier, 2008; Toshkov, 2008) and in the case of environmental policy (Börzel & Buzogány, 2019; Zhelyazkova et al., 2017). Epstein and Sedelmeier (2008) summarised that while 'in certain areas, compliance with international institutions [...] declined [...], particularly with respect to political party platforms and economic and monetary union', generally '[c]ompliance with EU law among postcommunist member states has been strong in the post-enlargement period' (Epstein & Sedelmeier, 2008, p. 796). Moreover, even when infringements were detected, the CEE countries settled faster the infringement procedure in comparison to the rest of the EU members, with the result that 'virtually all of the EU8 outperformed virtually all of the EU15' (Sedelmeier, 2008, p. 807). Nevertheless, this could not rule out scepticism of 'paper compliance' voiced in the literature. Particularly the 'democratic backsliding' in some of the formerly leading new member states, such as Poland and Hungary, suggested that the attractiveness of the EU as a transformative power has suffered (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2014; Öniş & Kutlay, 2019).

We argue in this paper that 'democratic backsliding' also has kick-on effects on sectoral policies that are not directly related to the rule of law controversy between the European

Commission and some of the new member states. To this end, we refer to the term 'environmental backsliding' not as outright non-application of the European environmental legislation, but more as a deviation from the original meaning of the EU environmental norms which were implemented during the accession period. Our study points out that the 'unmaking' of the Europeanisation process is related to the establishment of a new model of post-communist state characterised by centralisation and economic nationalism.

The empirical analysis in this paper is a comparison of case studies and focuses on the implementation of two EU environmental policies concerning drinking water quality and municipal waste in Hungary. Hungary is a former front-runner country in terms of Europeanisation but has also emerged as the major example of 'democratic backsliding' among the CEE member states. Under the premiership of Viktor Orbán, after 2010 the country has openly drifted away from embracing European values and opposing EU integration. In the case of compliance with EU rule of law norms, researchers have found that Hungary has engaged in a cat-mouse game of 'creative compliance' (Batory, 2016). The legal scholarship has predominantly focused on the often relatively vaguely defined norms related to democracy and rule of law (Müller, 2015). Our paper complements this literature by analysing the policy implications of democratic backsliding in the environmental field where the EU holds clear competencies and can use its instruments to enforce compliance to a full extent (Buzogány, 2012; Lindstrom, 2020). Data were collected by the authors through in-depth interviews that took place during several field-work missions in Hungary between 2006 and 2011 in the case of water policy and between 2011 and 2014 for waste policy and through content analysis of the most recent legislative and policy documents.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we highlight pre- and post-accession dynamics related to Europeanisation focusing on the consolidation of democracy and rule of law, market economy and harmonisation with EU environmental policies. In the following two empirical sections we present evidence from the municipal waste and water, which are among the most expensive EU environmental policies the member states have to implement. These examples suggest that sectoral implementation is closely related to the sweeping structural changes of the political regime towards 'illiberal democracy' as well as towards a more state-centred economic development (Rogers, 2020; Voszka, 2018; Varga, 2021; Buzogány, 2021; Scheiring & Szombati, 2020).

## **2. The Europeanisation of environmental policies in CEE**

We rely on the 'Europeanization' framework developed to understand EU-driven top-down domestic change in the member states. Conceptually, Europeanisation is usually described by referring to the two causal mechanisms determining the 'domestication' of European policies (Börzel & Risse, 2003). The first is based on the rationalist 'logic of consequentiality' and points to EU-induced changes affecting domestic opportunity structures, such as the redistribution of resources, the presence of veto points and formal institutions as central factors affecting institutional change at the domestic level. The second mechanism is grounded in sociological insights and relies on the 'logic of appropriateness'. Here, EU-related changes of domestic norms and collective understandings play a role and social learning is regarded as a fundamental mechanism of

institutional change that is catalysed by epistemic communities and informal institutions as promoters of a re-conceptualisation of identities and interests.

Both mechanisms are helpful to conceptualise EU-related domestic changes taking place on the polity, politics and policy level (Börzel & Risse, 2003). While these mechanisms apply to all member states, for the CEE candidate states the extent of necessary domestic changes to become EU members were formulated in the catalogue of EU membership criteria, the so-called Copenhagen Criteria. The Copenhagen Criteria included mutually reinforcing political and economic expectations, the implementation of the EU legislation (i.e. the EU's *acquis communautaire*) but also the strengthening of the administrative capacities of the accession states in order to implement these Criteria (Dimitrova, 2002). Change related to EU accession has thus affected democratic rules, market relations and concrete public policies.

Democratic rules were a core requirement for EU accession and included criteria such as the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. In some cases, such as Romania, Bulgaria or Croatia, the non-fulfilment of these criteria became a major hindrance for joining the 2004 wave of accession. At the same time, as Kochenov (2004) highlights, 'the assessment of democracy and the rule of law criterion was not really full, consistent and impartial and that the threshold to meet this criterion was very low'. From a perspective focused on the development of democracy in the CEE states an important point of contention in this context was that the EU-imposed reforms have often omitted proper domestic discussions; they superseded and changed traditional path dependencies or even exported the EU's own '*democratic deficit*' eastwards (Besseney Williams, 2001).

The Copenhagen Criteria have included not only political criteria but also the functioning of a market economy, including the capacity of CEE states to 'withstand market pressure' (Bruszt & Vukov, 2017). The enlargement of the European 'regulatory state' was thus achieved through the massive transfer of economic institutions and regulatory norms to the candidate states in order to create a level playing field where all players had to play according to the same rules.

According to the third Copenhagen criterion, accession countries needed to be able 'to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to transpose the EU laws in the national legislation and effectively implement them on the ground, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the '*acquis*'), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.' Most importantly, this has meant that prospective member states had to implement the 80,000 pages of the EU's *acquis communautaire* before accession. 'Anticipatory and adaptive Europeanization' (Ágh, 2003) of public policies following from this commitment entailed institutional and financial challenges, which went far beyond what the Southern member states (e.g. Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece) had to cope with (Christiansen & Tangen, 2002). The CEE states were confronted with a growing and ever more complex system of EU regulations. Moreover, the EU was also more demanding in its requirements for membership with the CEE states than with other states before. Next to the adoption of the *acquis*, the CEE candidate countries were asked to build the institutional and administrative capacities necessary to make EU policies work before accession.

The core of the European environmental conditionality was laid in Chapter 22 which was divided into ten sections. These sections provided the basis to examine candidate

countries' compliance with EU environmental policy (Andonova, 2005). Formal legislative assimilation has accompanied implementation on the ground of these statutory provisions. In this manner, the environmental support programme became integrated in economic and other policy spheres of the accession states (Schreurs, 2004). Another aspect of the enlargement criteria was that the ecological benefits of biological diversity had to be maintained. Accession states were obliged to establish realistic long-term national environmental strategies dealing with effective and gradual assimilation. Implementation of these national strategies was to begin immediately. The European Commission determined which environmental sectors were top priorities on a case-by-case basis, mentioning in particular the need for adjustment in air and water pollution and waste management (Buzogány, 2015).

To sum up, the EU's 'accession conditionality' became the main driving force behind environmental policy reforms in the CEE states in the decade before their EU membership (Andonova, 2005; Buzogány, 2015, 2016b; Cotta, 2015, 2018; Koutalakis et al., 2010). The European Commission closely monitored the legal implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, which became the central criteria for membership towards the end of the accession negotiations. Technical and financial assistance provided by EU programmes, such as PHARE, SAPARD or ISPA, offered additional incentives for CEE governments to pull EU requirements down to the national level and helped to mitigate domestic resistance (Buzogány, 2012).

While these mechanisms help to understand pre-accession developments related to the establishment of laws and institutions in the environmental field (Buzogány, 2009), the conceptual framework of Europeanisation needs to be adjusted for the CEE states' EU membership period. This is discussed by a large literature that focuses on compliance with EU public policies (Börzel, 2021). In such frameworks, conditionality is replaced with enforcement through the EU, while management and legitimacy remain important to explain the extent of domestic change. Mechanisms of EU treaty enforcement discussed in the compliance literature, such as sanctions and infringement procedures replace the vanishing of external incentives over membership. After accession, the Commission can start legal action against the new member states by opening infringement proceedings according to Art. 226 ECT. If member states refuse to implement EU law, the Commission can bring them before the European Court of Justice, which can impose financial sanctions. The political and financial costs, which infringement proceedings incur on member states, provide a powerful tool to exert external pressure. In addition, if failing to comply, the CEE governments do not only face a loss of reputation and bargaining power but can also suffer financial penalties or be confronted with 'freezing' EU financial support from the Structural Funds, which in the case of the CEE countries may be particularly painful given their weak fiscal and administrative capacities (Surubar, 2020).

### **3. Pre-accession implementation in the waste and water sector**

Adapting EU waste management and drinking water quality standards was considered among the most difficult and costly environmental sectors to comply with by Hungary. The European Waste Framework Directive (EWF), first adopted in 1975 and revised several times over the years (75/442/EEC; 91/156/EEC, 2006/12/EC and 2008/98/EC) contain relevant provisions for the correct management of municipal waste by requiring

member states to set up plans for the management of municipal waste at national, regional and local levels, as well as establish an integrated system for collection and disposal of waste in the nearest area from the source of waste generation. Member states had to discourage disposal of waste in landfill sites by promoting separate waste collection, recycling, recovery and reuse and constructing appropriate facilities at regional and local levels. To comply and implement these provisions it was thus expected a certain degree of decentralisation which created several problems of coordination between the Hungarian Ministry of Environment, recognised as the main responsible body in relation to the environmental policy-making, and other ministries such as the Ministry of Finance and the one on Health which were involved in managing the financial and health-related aspects of the environmental legislation. Moreover, 1990 Act LXV on Local Governments gave the responsibility to municipalities over the management of municipal waste while implementation and enforcement of the waste provisions had to be monitored by the Regional Environmental Inspectorates. Hungarian authorities also estimated investments of over 400 billion Hungarian forint (HUF), between 1.8 billion and 4.4 billion euro (World Bank, 1999), to meet the European waste requirements together with additional staff to manage waste at national, regional and local levels (European Commission, 1999).

Together with the waste directives, the implementation of the EU's Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EEC) in Hungary was by far the most expensive challenge of EU accession related adaptation, accounting for 4.3–4.5 billion €. The directive defines water quality standards and implies on the one hand a functioning monitoring system, and on the other hand, an improvement of the water quality and of the supply network. During the accession negotiations, Hungary first questioned the necessity and legitimacy of the water quality standards of the DWD and then asked for long derogations for implementing them (Bod, 2007; Origo, 2005). The reason for Hungary's reluctance was that due to regional geo-morphological characteristics as arsenic, ammonium and nitrate concentration of Hungarian drinking water was considerably higher than the DWD's standards: While EU legislation set the limits of arsenic concentration to 10 µg/l, in several Hungarian regions this values reached 50 µg/l (Magyar Hírlap, 2005; Varsányi et al., 1991). In fact, only 58% of the Hungarian population lived in settlements where drinking water quality was up to EU regulations. Hungary argued for keeping its standards relying on scientific evidence which could not substantiate higher public health dangers in Hungarian regions with high arsenic concentration. However, the Commission refused Hungary's position with reference to public health but acknowledged that the tasks related to raising the quality of Hungarian drinking water, including the instalment of new technologies, the reconstruction of old sewage networks or finding alternative water sources were exceptionally investment-heavy. As a result, in its Accession Treaty Hungary has granted two derogations and full compliance with the DWD had to be reached in two steps, in 2006 and 2009, respectively. While accepting the relatively short transition periods as part of the package deal, the legitimacy of EU water parameters remained controversial in Hungary also after accession and was used by domestic actors, such as mayors of affected municipalities, to delegitimize the DWD after becoming a member state.

The Hungarian water and waste management sector underwent a similar development when decentralisation in the early 1990s led to the municipalisation of the formerly Communist state-owned water utilities and waste collection and treatment facilities. Many municipalities established their own water utility companies, their number



increased from 36 in 1990 to over 400 in 1995. However, decentralisation also left most of the local communities short of funding and without the relevant administrative resources required to manage their newly acquired assets (Assetto et al., 2003; Soos, 2003). This had lasting effects on the quality of the water utilities system as most municipalities lacked qualified personnel for sustainable management and the means for the maintenance of water infrastructure. Mayors regularly shied away increasing water fees covering maintenance costs out of political considerations. Instead, they sought to secure state subsidies for their water utilities, perverting the state subsidy system which was initially established to reduce regional differences between water tariffs (Kiss & Ángyán, 2006; Péter, 2007).

The municipalisation of public utilities was followed by a partial privatisation of water provisions by involving transnational companies that were expected to bring in new technologies and know-how regarding the implementation of EU water quality standards, including the knowledge on acceding to the EU funds. As local governments were prohibited by law to sell their assets, different forms of concessions contracts, joint ventures and public–private partnerships emerged in the 1990s that involved private actors in the management of water utilities. The participation of transnational companies such as Veolia, SUEZ, RWE, E-on, and BerlinWaters has focused on large cities such as Budapest, Szeged, Pécs or Szolnok, where investment needs were not excessively high. Approximately 40% of the water was distributed by at least partially privatised companies. Although the private companies were not given more than 50% of the shares in order to allow for the municipalities to maintain some control, the long-term privatisation agreements signed have often limited their say (Boda et al 2008).

A similar development took place in the waste sector, where many state-owned waste collecting companies became owned by municipalities or were privatised by international companies. Austrian, French and German companies established branches in Hungary and bought existing regional and local companies or established joint-ventures with Hungarian municipalities (Dax et al., 2001). Waste collecting companies owned by municipalities were automatically appointed for municipal waste collection and disposal facilities used for waste treatment within the municipality, but in case these were not operating, local authorities were obliged to select the collecting companies and the treatment facilities in use through competitive public tender procedures for a five-year appointment (Dax et al. 2001). This made waste management a good business opportunity for foreign waste collecting companies which considered expanding their operations to Hungary where waste management standards were lacking. In doing so, they exported knowledge and technical standards from the EU. In some cases, they bought and started to invest and modernise already existing waste disposal sites. For example, the landfill site in Dunakeszi built in the early 1980s was bought by foreign companies in the 1990s which invested in its modernisation by building biogas and separate collection facilities in conformity with the EU waste requirements. In other cases, foreign companies constructed new landfill sites which used modern technologies, and followed the EU waste requirements. The extent of the role played by foreign companies is remarked also by Dax et al (2001) who attribute to foreign companies the construction of ‘the first modern EU-conforming landfills in Hungary’ (Dax et al. 2001, 12). After a few years of operation in the management of waste treatment facilities, foreign companies expanded in the waste collection system by participating in public tender procedures and then making contracts

with municipalities. Since the beginning, these companies implemented their services following the EU requirements but despite the fact that at first their services were more expensive than the others because they followed the EU rules, in a few years the system adapted to their prices. Furthermore, these companies invested in technology and machinery and were able to rapidly acquire shares of the collection market. According to the United States Foreign and Commercial Service, in the early 2000s approximately 75–80% of the total Hungarian waste market was owned by foreign investors, mostly from Germany, Austria and France and it was expected to grow 8–10% in the following years (Davies, 2000).

In sum, the decentralisation and municipalisation process has resulted in a fractionalised ownership structure of waste and water management facilities. Adapting to the EU's environmental acquis has thus opened the market in the waste and water management sector for EU-based companies, which already complied with stringent EU waste and water requirements and exported their know-how and cleaner technology to Hungary.

#### **4. Post-accession implementation dynamics in the waste and water sector: Environmental backsliding?**

When Hungary became a member state of the EU in 2004, two important elements potentially affecting the Hungarian environmental compliance path came into play: EU financing and sanctioning. As regards EU financing, before 2004 most of the EU assistance projects to Hungary had been financed by pre-Accession PHARE and ISPA funds aimed at improving knowledge of EU legislation as well as funding the construction and modernisation of water and waste treatment facilities. EU investments on environmental issues for the financing period 2007–2013 increased and targeted mostly municipal waste and water treatment projects at local levels. However, the lack of experience, expertise and staff in managing the EU funds in the Ministry and at local level and problems connected to the procedures for the application to the EU funds have sometimes brought to delays in the implementation of EU funded projects.

In the municipal waste sector, EU and Hungarian investments targeted mainly the modernisation and construction of EU compliant waste disposal sites and in this attempt, since the mid-2000s the Hungarian government spent annually nearly 100 billion HUF in waste management facilities.<sup>1</sup> By the late 2000s, Hungary had 66 operating regional landfill sites of which 24 were constructed with EU subsidies (Cotta, 2018). However, problems concerned the planning capacity of municipalities and of the Hungarian managing authority in terms of EU co-financing (Cotta, 2018). Often, associations of municipalities were established to manage EU financed waste facilities, but such solutions revealed several managerial weaknesses on the side of municipalities. In some cases, municipalities were not able to establish an association responsible for the common facility or they were unable to manage the association because of the lack of a common governance model at the local and governmental levels. A more successful solution was the creation of joint ventures and public-private partnerships between foreign companies and municipalities (Fleischer & Futó, 2005).

Water infrastructure investments were carried out through the National Drinking Water Quality Improvement Programme (DWIP) (*Nemzeti Ivóvízminőség-Javító Program*),

launched in 1997. Due to budget deficits, the DWIP was allocated much less funding than was initially considered to be necessary: A report of the State Audit Committee found that for the planning period 2004–2006 only 4% of the funds were provided from the state budget (FIDESZ, 2008; ÁSZ, 2006, p. 65). A further problem emerged when EU funding through the Sectoral Operational Programme on Environment and Energy was announced very late, turned out to be much lower than expected while the share of own contributions from the municipalities was increased to 25% (Bod, 2007; Origo, 2006). Adding to this, EU funding could not be used for general modernisation of water utilities, so that raising the drinking water quality parameters remained ineffective due to leaking water pipes. When municipalities and business actors became aware of the full costs and the lacking funding available for reaching the EU drinking water quality standards they started to mobilise against the provisions of the directive (Borsányi & Dura, 2006). The effective application for EU funding required close collaboration and drastic reduction in the number of municipally owned water utilities from the existing several hundred to 30–40 regionally integrated water companies which would be able to qualify for funding (168 Óra, 2010). Thus, while EU funds were available, the complex and the bureaucratic nature of the application process emerged as a major bottleneck for municipalities lacking these administrative capacities.

As regards sanctioning, Hungary has been integrated in the monitoring system of the European Commission and the infringement procedure<sup>2</sup> of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In the first years after accession to the EU, Hungary had timely transposed the European waste legislation and in the case of non-conformity problems these were early settled without referral to the ECJ.<sup>3</sup> In 2008, the European Commission revised the European Waste Framework Directive (2008 EWFD) which had to be transposed by the EU Members by the end of 2010. However, in January 2011 only 4 EU member states had timely and correctly transposed this directive, and Hungary was not among them.<sup>4</sup> In February 2011, the Commission sent a letter of formal notice to the Hungarian government led by the FIDESZ party to ask for information, but not satisfied by the Hungarian response, the European Commission sent a reasoned opinion. In July 2011 the Hungarian government drafted a new waste act to transpose the 2008 EWFD. However, this draft law contained provisions aimed at a reorganisation of the municipal waste management system which brought to a legislative paralysis in Hungary. In April 2012 the European Commission referred Hungary to the ECJ concerning the non-transposition of the 2008 EWFD and asked the imposition of a financial penalty (i.e. 27,326 €) to be paid per day until the Directive was transposed in Hungary.<sup>5</sup> The key problem was that the draft law would have allowed only companies owned in majority by public entities to compete in public tenders for the collection of municipal waste in a given municipality, while private companies would have had to leave the system. While the European Commission did not oppose the draft (but reserved the right to take action at later stages), fierce opposition came from waste management companies of Germany, Austria and France and their lobbies in Brussels, thus showing the strong interest of international companies operating in the Hungarian waste management sector. Discussions on the topic were also held in the European Parliament. Despite these concerns, in late 2012 the Waste Disposal Act (Law CL XXXV/2012) was adopted and entered into force on 1 January 2013.

With the aim of improving the monitoring of waste flows and giving more responsibilities to municipalities on waste matters, the 2012 Act restructured the municipal waste

market by allowing the waste collection only to public entities with at least 51% ownership by the state or the municipalities and the ownership of the landfills to local authorities or the state (European Union 2016; Merta, 2016). This also increased the role of the state in the waste collection and treatment operations (Dienes 2012; Budapest Beacon, 2014b). As a result, the National Landfill Organization acquired several landfill facilities owned by foreign companies such as the German Remondis and Austrian AVE (Budapest Beacon, 2014b). This was also a way for public authorities to return 'to public investment to provide waste collection services' at 'prices of the oligopoly' (Arcadis 2016:185). Changes along these lines were announced during the electoral campaign of 2014, when the incumbent government led by FIDESZ promised a reduction of utility prices in relation to waste and water matters, with the aim of making waste services cheaper for Hungarian families. At the same time, the changes introduced by the 2012 Act increased enormously the costs for private waste collecting companies, which often became economically unsustainable forcing several companies to leave the Hungarian waste collection market (Keller-Alánt, 2016). In parallel, the FIDESZ government reorganised the municipal waste institutional setting with the establishment of the National Waste Management Agency (*Országos Hulladékgazdálkodási Ügynökség*, OHÜ) in 2011 to coordinate and control selective waste management as well as monitor the public services in charge of collecting municipal waste. In 2015, OHÜ was replaced by the National Waste Management Directorate (OKTF-NHI) in charge of organising and managing the waste collection system in Hungary by signing contracts with public service providers and giving them financial support to contribute to the fulfilment of recycling targets.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, several foreign waste companies that were forced to leave the Hungarian waste market, such as Remondis and AVE, were later taken over by the National Waste Management Coordinating and Trust Private Limited Company (*Nemzeti Hulladékgazdálkodási Koordináló és Vagyonkezelő Zrt.*, hereafter NHKV), a state-owned company created by the FIDESZ government in 2016 to manage waste (Keller-Alánt, 2016). These systemic and institutional changes had also important implications for the effective implementation of the 2008 EWFD in Hungary. According to a recent European document, the reorganisation of the system and the establishment of new public bodies in charge of managing municipal waste has weakened the collection and treatment of specific waste segments such as food waste and glass while also the extent of the coverage of separate waste collection for households remains unclear (DG Environment 2016a). At the same time, with the little involvement of private companies, governmental bodies appear to lack technical and financial capacity to fulfil their obligations (DG Environment 2016b).

In the case of drinking water provisions, Hungary has received an infringement procedure already in 2008 for failing to comply with the Drinking Water Directive. Facing infringement proceedings from the EU, municipalities from the regions with low-quality drinking water were forced to hand out drinking water to inhabitants or to channel higher quality drinking water from neighbouring countries into their system (Tanács, 2010). However, by the end of the third derogation period in 2012 almost 80% of the water supply zones under derogation were still not compliant with the Directive (European Court of Auditors, 2017). When FIDESZ came to power in 2010 with a supermajority, the political conflicts which have hindered passing legislation clarifying the statutes of water utilities for two decades were suddenly over and a new Law on Water

Utilities (2011/ CCIX) was passed which clearly rebalanced the water management system towards recentralisation and nationalisation. Price-setting responsibilities were recentralised from the municipalities to the Ministry of National Development. The law has also led to an ownership concentration in the sector by prescribing that only utilities serving more than 150,000 inhabitants could remain on the market. Eventually, water quality started to improve slowly, but in 2016 still one sixth of the zones under derogation did not comply with EU standards, resulting in the EU opening a second infringement procedure against Hungary on this matter (2016/2047).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The Europeanisation process driven mostly by the European membership conditionality has been a powerful incentive for the compliance and implementation of European policies in CEE candidate countries and crucial for the establishing and developing their environmental agenda (Andonova, 2005). While empirical studies have offered a mixed picture on the post-accession period with backsliding in the domain of democracy, rule of law, and a more optimistic picture regarding early assessments of formal compliance with EU legislation, much less is known on how European policies, and particularly the environmental policies, have been implemented in CEE after accession. In this paper we have focused on Hungary and two areas of environmental policy concerning water and waste. Adopting EU regulations in these fields are among the most expensive ones. These two cases provide good examples of how in the post-accession period the Hungarian governments, especially those led by the FIDESZ party, changed the regulatory regime through *unmaking Europeanisation*.

We can see several parallel developments in the waste and water sectors that relate to three main goals in FIDESZ's sweeping project of reforming the state: 1) recentralisation and strengthening the role of the state, 2) securing popular support through populist social policies, and 3) supporting a new class of domestic capitalists closely related to the party. In both the waste and water sector, FIDESZ has first followed an agenda that alienated non-Hungarian companies active on the market together with a strategy of remunicipalisation (Horváth & Bartha, 2018). In the next step, however, regional or national level integration was supported through strengthening executive oversight or centralising price-setting at the national level instead of leaving it as a competence of local governments. While these decisions could be interpreted as a necessary regulation of a defunct market in the field of public utilities that proved hard to reform during the last three decades, the political nature of the project became more and more obvious after 2010, with the state taking over more and more competences in both water and waste management.

Second, FIDESZ has used the reduction of utility prices as a main element of the electoral campaign. As a result, waste and water utility pricing was to be reduced by 10%, which diminished the profits available in the sector necessary for further investments. In the case of water provision, the government ordered cuts of public utility prices contradicted the necessity to introduce market prices that reflect the real price of the water. Furthermore, an extra tax was levied on public utilities, which has caused further financial problems (Századvég, 2018). As a result, most of the water utilities and sewage

companies were confronted with large deficits (Rádi, 2017). Thus, making public utilities not-for profit did not only force non-national shareholders to leave the market but had negative implications also for the remaining domestic ones (KPMG, 2015).

Third, increasing the role of the state in providing public services often overlaps with the aim of creating a domestic capitalist class that is closely linked with FIDESZ. Thus, both in the waste management and the water utilities sector entrepreneurs from FIDESZ's backyard started showing an increased presence. For instance, Lőrinc Mészáros, a childhood friend of Viktor Orbán and Hungary's richest person, has widened his portfolio of activities to include the waste and water sector (atlatszo.hu, 2020b; Budapest Beacon, 2014a). The most recent development in the waste sector after the failure of nationalisation, are plans to introduce a new system of concessions which would offer a single private company the right to manage the waste collection system. Critics fear that this would essentially result in going full circle from nationalisation to re-privatisation to the benefit of politically well-connected business interests (atlatszo.hu, 2020a; Elöd, 2020; Marnitz, 2020).

The two case studies of water and waste policies, thus, show that *unmaking Europeanisation* takes place not only related to Copenhagen Criteria of democracy and market economy, which are often considered to be vague rather difficult to defend (Kochenov, 2004), but also related to the environmental dimension in the EU's *acquis*, where the EU has tools at its hand to enforce its policies. In both cases, the Hungarian government led by FIDESZ was successful in changing the regulatory regime to a more nationalised and centralised one. In conclusion, our case studies illustrate and complement the overall picture emerging about the illiberal backsliding taking place in the CEE region. Our paper shows that Hungary's new stage of state transformation is characterised by renationalisation and demarketization trends in the environmental policy sector. Our research complements similar findings in fields like pension policy (Naczyk & Domonkos, 2016), social policy (Szikra, 2014) or state aid (Lindstrom, 2020). Further research should look at similar processes in policy sectors with high strategic and environmental implications, such as energy or finances. These trends are not unique to Hungary but can be found also in other post-Communist EU member states, the findings from Hungary can contribute to further cross-country and cross-regional analysis of these issues.

We conclude by highlighting the importance of further analysis of environmental challenges regarding the impact and the role of international organisations, environmental policy implementation of member-states, further democratic backsliding and populism in CEE but also world-wide (Barrett & Graddy, 2000; Izotov & Obydenkova, 2020; Midlarsky, 1998; Payne, 1995; Povitkina, 2018; Shandra et al., 2012). Contributing to studies on the nexus of international organisations, political regimes and environment policy, this paper demonstrated the crucial role of the EU in establishing and developing the environmental agenda in CEEs. We also demonstrated that democratic backsliding in post-Communist new EU member-states has been associated with what we called 'environmental backsliding'. Moreover, the paper demonstrated how democratic and environmental backsliding go hand-in-hand. Therefore, the studies of the EU and other international organisations as environmental actors are even more important and crucial for the future of sustainable development and its successful implementation.

## Notes

1. [https://build.export.gov/build/idcplg?IdcService=DOWNLOAD\\_PUBLIC\\_FILE&RevisionSelectionMethod=Latest&dDocName=hungary100797](https://build.export.gov/build/idcplg?IdcService=DOWNLOAD_PUBLIC_FILE&RevisionSelectionMethod=Latest&dDocName=hungary100797)
2. After the adoption of a new directive at EU level, the member states have the obligation to notify to the Commission its transposition in the national legislation. If the Commission does not receive the notification or, if after the conformity checking of the national law there is still something missing, it sends a reasoned opinion asking explanations to the member state. The member state can reply agreeing or disagreeing with the Commission and in this second case, the Commission sends back a letter of formal notice. If the problem still persists, then the Commission addresses the problem to the ECJ that formally starts an infringement procedure. For details, see <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/legal/law/procedure.htm>
3. Between 2004 and 2010, Hungary received only a few letters of formal notice from the European Commission concerning the non-conformity in the implementation of waste requirements (Landfill Directive in 2007, Waste from Electric and Electronic Equipment in 2007) which were rapidly settled without referral to the ECJ. For details, see [https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement\\_decisions/index.cfm?lang\\_code=EN&typeOfSearch=true&active\\_only=0&noncom=0&r\\_dossier=&decision\\_date\\_from=01%2F07%2F2003&decision\\_date\\_to=01%2F04%2F2010&EM=HU&DG=ENV&title=&submit=Search](https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement_decisions/index.cfm?lang_code=EN&typeOfSearch=true&active_only=0&noncom=0&r_dossier=&decision_date_from=01%2F07%2F2003&decision_date_to=01%2F04%2F2010&EM=HU&DG=ENV&title=&submit=Search)
4. For details, see [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-11-595\\_en.htm?locale=fr](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-595_en.htm?locale=fr)
5. For details on the failed transposition of Directive 2008/98/EC, see [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-12-422\\_en.htm?locale=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-422_en.htm?locale=en)
6. <http://www.szelektivinfo.hu/en/about-us>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## ORCID

Aron Buzogány  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9867-3742>

Benedetta Cotta  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1962-1862>

## References

- 168 Óra. (2010). *Robbant a vízbomba*. <http://www.168ora.hu/itthon/robbant-a-vizbomba-bekesben-45144.html>.
- Ágh, A. (2003). *Anticipatory and adaptive Europeanization in Hungary, Together for Europe series*. Hungarian Centre for Democracy Studies.
- Ágh, A., Ferencz, A., & Moczári, J. (2007). *Public policy-making in the EU after Enlargement, Budapest, Together for Europe Research Centre and Foundation*.
- Andonova, L. (2005). The europeanization of environmental policy in central and Eastern Europe. In F. Schimmelfennig & U. Sedelmeier (Eds.), *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe* (pp. 135–156). Cornell University Press.
- Arcadis (2016). Study on the efficient functioning of waste markets in the EU, final report. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/studies/pdf/waste\\_market\\_study.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/studies/pdf/waste_market_study.pdf)
- Assetto, V. J., Hajba, E., & Mumme, S. P. (2003). Democratization, decentralization, and local environmental policy capacity: Hungary and Mexico. *The Social Science Journal*, 40(2), 249–268. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0362-3319\(03\)00007-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0362-3319(03)00007-7)
- ÁSZ. (2006). *Jelentés a Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Minisztérium fejezet működésének ellenőrzéséről*

- atlatszo.hu. (2020a). *Elvénnek az önkormányzatoktól a szemetet, jöhetnek a nemzeti hulladékgazdák.* <https://atlatszo.hu/2020/2006/2005/elvennek-az-onkormanyzatoktol-a-szemetet-johetnek-a-nemzeti-hulladeggazdak/>
- atlatszo.hu. (2020b). *Megmondtuk előre: újabb pénzgyarat szerzett magának Mészáros cégcsoportja.* <https://blog.atlatszo.hu/2020/2004/megmondtuk-elore-ujabb-penzgyarat-szerzett-maganak-meszaros-cegcsoportja/>
- Auer, M. (2004). *Restoring cursed earth: Appraising environmental policy reforms in central and Eastern Europe and Russia.* Rowman & Littlefield.
- Barrett, S., & Graddy, K. (2000). Freedom, growth, and the environment. *Environment and Development Economics*, 5(4), 433–456. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355770X00000267>
- Batory, A. (2016). Defying the commission: Creative compliance and respect for the rule of law in the Eu. *Public Administration*, 94(3), 685–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12254>
- Besseney Williams, M. (2001). Exporting the democratic deficit”. Hungary’s experience with Eu integration. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 48(1), 27–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2001.11655915>
- Bod, T. (2007, December 4). Ivóvízprojektek: Árhullám. *Magyar Narancs*, 15. [https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/ivovizprojektek\\_arhullam-66966](https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/ivovizprojektek_arhullam-66966)
- Boda, Zs., & Scheiring, G. (2008). Hungary. In E. Lobina & D. Hall (Eds.), *Social Policies and Private Sector Participation in Water Supply* (pp. 178–202): Springer
- Borsányi, M., & Dura, G. (2006). Maintenance and improvement of drinking water in the food sector in Hungary. In G. Dura, V. Kambourova, & F. Simeonova (Eds.), *Management of intentional and accidental water pollution* (pp. 241–248). New York: Springer.
- Börzel, T. A., & Risse, T. (2003). Conceptualising the domestic impact of Europe. In K. Featherstone & C. Radaelli (Eds.), *The politics of europeanisation* (pp. 55–78). Oxford University Press.
- Börzel, T. A. (2021). *Why noncompliance: The politics of law in the European Union.* Cornell University Press.
- Börzel, T. A., & Buzogány, A. (2010a). Governing EU accession in transition countries: The role of non-state actors. *Acta politica*, 45(1–2), 158–182. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2009.26>
- Börzel, T. A., & Buzogány, A. (2010b). Environmental organisations and the Europeanisation of public policy in Central and Eastern Europe: The case of biodiversity governance. *Environmental Politics*, 19(5), 708–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2010.508302>
- Börzel, T. A., & Buzogány, A. (2019). Compliance with EU environmental law. The iceberg is melting. *Environmental Politics*, 28(2), 315–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2019.1549772>
- Börzel, T. A., & Sedelmeier, U. (2017). Larger and more law abiding? The impact of enlargement on compliance in the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(2), 197–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1265575>
- Bruszt, L., & Vukov, V. (2017). European integration and the evolution of economic state capacities in Southern and Eastern Europe. In D. King & P. Le Galès (Eds.), *Reconfiguring European States in Crisis*, 158–180. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Budapest Beacon. (2014a). *Felcsut mayor Lorinc Meszaros is doing better.* <https://budapestbeacon.com/felcsut-mayor-lorinc-meszáros-better/>
- Budapest Beacon. (2014b). *Public waste management companies threatened with bankruptcy.* <https://budapestbeacon.com/waste-management-in-hungary/>
- Buzogány, A. (2009). Hungary: The tricky path of building environmental governance. In T. Börzel (Ed.), *Coping with accession to the European Union. New modes of environmental governance* (pp. 123–147). Palgrave.
- Buzogány, A. (2012). Accelerating or Back-peddaling?: Public administration in post-accession Central and Eastern Europe. *Europe en formation: les cahiers du fédéralisme*, 364(2), 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.3917/eufor.364.0111>
- Buzogány, A. (2015). Building governance on fragile grounds: Lessons from Romania. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 33(5), 901–918. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263774x15605897>



- Buzogány, A. (2016a). EU-Russia regulatory competition and business interests in post-Soviet countries: The case of forestry and chemical security in Ukraine. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 57(1), 138–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1163642>
- Buzogány, A. (2016b). Representation and participation in movement: Strategies of civil society organisations in Hungary. *Südosteuropa*, 63(3), 491–514.
- Buzogány, A., Frankenberger, R., & Graf, P. (2019). Und sie reg (ul) ieren doch. Policy-making, Performanz und Legitimation in Autokratien. In C. Wiesner & P. Harfst (Eds.), *Legitimität und Legitimation* (pp. 277–314). Wiesbaden: Springer VS
- Carlitz, R. D., & Povitkina, M. (2021). Local interest group activity and environmental degradation in authoritarian regimes. *World Development*, 142, 105425. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105425>
- Carmin, J., & VanDeveer, S. D. (2005). *EU enlargement and the environment: Institutional change and environmental policy in Central and Eastern Europe*. Psychology Press.
- Christiansen, A. C., & Tangen, K. (2002). The shadow of the past: Environmental Issues and institutional learning in EU enlargement processes. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 4(1), 67–86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jepp.97>
- Cotta, B. (2015). *The “business” of compliance*. [Doctoral Dissertation]. European University Institute.
- Cotta, B. (2018). Wasted money, wasted time? The sustainability of EU assistance to Hungary and Poland’s waste management sector. *Emecon Employment and Economy in Central and Eastern Europe*, 7(1), 1–18.
- Davies, S. (2000). *The private sector and waste management in central and eastern Europe 2000*. Public Services International Research Unit, London
- Dax, P., Fucskó, J., Krajner, P., & Ungvári, G. (2001). *Public Grants & Private Investment in Solid Waste Management-Alföld, Hungary*. Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute
- DG Environment. (2016b). *Municipal waste compliance promotion exercise 2014–5*. Publications Office of the EU.
- DG Environment. (2016a). *Municipal waste compliance promotion exercise 2014–5*. Publications Office of the EU
- Dimitrov, V. (2009). *Cost of institutional harmonization in the ENP countries, CASE network studies and analyses*. CASE Network.
- Dimitrova, A. (2002). Enlargement, institution-building and the EU’s administrative capacity requirement. *West European Politics*, 25(4), 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713601647>
- Dimitrova, A. L. (2010). The new member states in the EU in the aftermath of accession. Empty shells? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 17(1), 137–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760903464929>
- Dimitrova, A. L., & Buzogány, A. (2014). Post-Accession Policy Making in Bulgaria and Romania: Can Non-state Actors use EU Rules to Promote Better Governance., *Journal of Common Market Studies* 52(1), 139–156
- Elöd, F. (2020). *Tovább épül az állami kukavár: Országos monopóliumba adják a hulladékgazdálkodást*. <https://telex.hu/gazdasag/2020/2012/2015/hulladek-szemet-monopolium-hulladegzadalkodas-torvenyjavaslat>.
- Epstein, R. A., & Sedelmeier, U. (2008). Beyond conditionality: International institutions in postcommunist Europe after enlargement. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15(6), 795–805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802196465>
- European Commission. (1999). *Screening Report for the environmental chapter, Hungary*.
- European Court of Auditors. (2017). *Implementing the Drinking Water Directive: Water quality and access to it improved in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, but investment needs remain substantial*.
- European Union (2016), *Municipal Waste Compliance Promotion Exercise 2014–2015 Executive Summary*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. doi:10.2779/609002
- Fagan, A. (2004). *Environment and democracy in the Czech Republic: The environmental movement in the transition process*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Falkner, G., & Treib, O. (2008). Three worlds of compliance or four? The EU-15 compared to new member states. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46(2), 293–313. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2007.00777.x>
- FIDESZ. (2008). *Megbukott a Nemzeti Környezetvédelmi Program II.* <http://www.fidesz.hu/index.php?Cikk=113733>
- Fleischer, T., & Futó, P. (2005). *EU integration mechanisms affecting Hungarian public policies in waste management.* Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
- Gille, Z. (2007). *From the cult of waste to the trash heap of history: The politics of waste in socialist and postsocialist Hungary.* Indiana University Press.
- Horváth, T. M., & Bartha, I. (2018). EU-compatible state measures and member states interests in public services: Lessons from the case of Hungary. *Central European Public Administration Review*, 16(1), 137–170. <https://doi.org/10.17573/cepar.v16i1.362>
- Izotov, V. S., & Obydenkova, A. V. (2020). Geopolitical games in Eurasian regionalism: Ideational interactions and regional international organisations. *Post-Communist Economies*, 33(2-3), 150–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2020.1793584>
- Jänicke, M. (1996). Democracy as a condition for environmental policy success: The importance of non-institutional factors. In W. M. Lafferty & J. Meadowcroft (Eds.), *Democracy and the environment: Problems and prospects* (pp. 71–85). Edgar Elgar.
- Keller-Alánt, Á. (2016). *A nagy biznissz.* Magyar Narancs, 2016/23 (06. 09). <http://magyarnarancs.hu/riport/a-nagy-biznissz-99630>
- Kiss, K., & Ángyán, J. (2006). *Tiltandó támogatások.* L'Harmattan.
- Knill, C., & Tosun, J. (2009). Post-accession transposition of EU law in the new member states: A cross-country comparison. *European Integration Online Papers (Eiop)*, 13(2). <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/pdf/2009-018.pdf>
- Kochenov, D. (2004). Behind the Copenhagen façade. The meaning and structure of the Copenhagen political criterion of democracy and the rule of law. *European Integration Online Papers*, 8(10), 1–24.
- Koutalakis, C., Buzogány, A., & Börzel, T. A. (2010). When soft regulation is not enough: The integrated pollution prevention and control directive of the European Union. *Regulation & Governance*, 4(3), 329–344. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-5991.2010.01084.x>
- KPMG. (2015). *A magyar víziközmű ágazat bemutatása - átfogó tanulmány.*
- Lankina, T., Libman, A., Obydenkova, A. (2016). Authoritarian and democratic diffusion in post-communist regions. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(12), 1599–1629. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016628270>
- Libman, A., & Obydenkova, A. (2014). The governance of commons in a large nondemocratic state: The case of forestry in the Russian Federation. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 44(2), 298–323. <https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjt065>
- Lindstrom, N. (2020). Aiding the state: Administrative capacity and creative compliance with European state aid rules in new member states. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2020.1791935>
- Magyar Hírlap. (2005). *Kettészakadt az ország: Kiváló víz itt, arzénés és bóros ott.* [http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/kronika/ketteszakadt\\_az\\_oroszag\\_kivalo\\_viz\\_itt\\_arzenes\\_es\\_boros\\_ott.html](http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/kronika/ketteszakadt_az_oroszag_kivalo_viz_itt_arzenes_es_boros_ott.html)
- Marnitz, I. (2020). *Jönnek a magánkukások: Kidobják a Fidesz eddigi hulladékékeleit.* Népszava. [https://nepszava.hu/3080676\\_jonnek-a-magankukasok-kidobjak-a-fidesz-eddigi-hulladekeleit](https://nepszava.hu/3080676_jonnek-a-magankukasok-kidobjak-a-fidesz-eddigi-hulladekeleit)
- Merta, E. (2016) *Municipal Waste Management Hungary October 2016.* European Environment Agency, Waste and Materials in Green Economy (ETC/WMGE). Available at: [https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-wmge/products/other-products/docs/hungary\\_msw\\_2016.pdf](https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-wmge/products/other-products/docs/hungary_msw_2016.pdf)
- Midlarsky, M. I. (1998). Democracy and the environment: An empirical assessment. *Journal of Peace Research*, 35(3), 341–361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343398035003005>
- Müller, J. W. (2015). Should the EU protect democracy and the rule of law inside member states? *European Law Journal*, 21(2), 141–160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eulj.12124>
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2014). The transformative power of Europe revisited. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(1), 20–32. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0003>

- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2015). *The quest for good governance: How societies develop control of corruption*. Cambridge University Press.
- Naczyk, M., & Domonkos, S. (2016). The financial crisis and varieties of pension privatization reversals in Eastern Europe. *Governance*, 29(2), 167–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12159>
- Obydenkova, A., Nazarov, Z., & Salohodjaev, R. (2016). The process of deforestation in the weak democracies and the role of intelligence. *Environmental Research*, 148(2), 484–490. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2016.03.039>
- Obydenkova, A. V. (2012). Democratization at the grassroots: The European Union's external impact. *Democratization*, 19(2), 230–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.576851>
- Obydenkova, A. V., & Salohodjaev, R. (2016). Intelligence, democracy, and international environmental commitment. *Environmental Research*, 147, 82–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2016.01.042>
- Obydenkova, A. V., & Salohodjaev, R. (2017). Climate change policies: The role of democracy and social cognitive capital. *Environmental Research*, 157, 182–189.
- Öniş, Z., & Kutlay, M. (2019). Global shifts and the limits of the EU's transformative power in the European periphery: Comparative perspectives from Hungary and Turkey. *Government and Opposition*, 54(2), 226–253. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2017.16>
- Origo. (2005). *Évekig iszunk még arzénos vizet*. <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20050909140milliardot.html> >
- Origo. (2006). *A tiszta ivóvizet kéri számon a kormányon, 2006. 06. 23*. <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20060621tiszta.html>.
- Ostrom, E. (2010). Polycentric systems for coping with collective action and global environmental change. *Global Environmental Change*, 20(4), 550–557. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2010.07.004>
- Ostrom, E. (2012). Nested externalities and polycentric institutions: Must we wait for global solutions to climate change before taking actions at other scales? *Economic Theory*, 49(2), 353–369. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00199-010-0558-6>
- Pál, V. (2017). *Technology and the environment in state-socialist hungary: An economic history*. Palgrave.
- Pavlinek, P., & Pickles, J. (2000). *Environmental transitions. Transformation and ecological defense in central and Eastern Europe*. Routledge.
- Payne, R. A. (1995). Freedom and the environment. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(3), 41–55. DOI: 10.1353/jod.1995.0053
- Péter, J. (2007). Law and sustainability: The impact of the Hungarian legal structure on the sustainability of the water services. *Utilities Policy*, 15(2), 121–133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jup.2007.01.003>
- Pollack, M. A. (2009). Europe united? The impact of the EU's eastern enlargement, five years on. *European View*, 8(2), 239–254. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-009-0100-z>
- Poole, P. A. (2003) *The EU 's Eastern Enlargement*, Praeger, Westport.
- Povitkina, M. (2018). The limits of democracy in tackling climate change. *Environmental Politics*, 27(3), 411–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1444723>
- Rádi, A. (2017). *Kritikus állapotban a víz- és csatornahálózat: A kiszivárgott jelentés drámai képet fest*. <https://blog.atlatszo.hu/2017/07/kritikus-allapotban-a-viz-es-csatornahalozat-a-kiszivargott-jelentes-dramai-kepet-fest/>
- Rogers, S. (2020). Fidesz, the state-subsumption of domestic business and the emergence of prebendalism: Capitalist development in an 'illiberal' setting. *Post-Communist Economies*, 32(5), 591–606. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2019.1689001>
- Scheiring, G., & Szombati, K. (2020). From neoliberal disembedding to authoritarian re-embedding: The making of illiberal hegemony in Hungary. *International Sociology*, 35(6), 721–738. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580920930591>
- Schimmelfennig, F., & Sedelmeier, U. (2005). *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*. Cornell University Press.

- Schreurs, M. (2004). EU enlargement and the environment: Institutional change and environmental policy in Central and Eastern Europe. *Environmental Politics*, 13(1), 27–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010410001685128>
- Sedelmeier, U. (2008). After conditionality: Post-accession compliance with EU law in East Central Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15(6), 806–825. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802196549>
- Sedelmeier, U. (2012). Is europeanization through conditionality sustainable? Lock-In of institutional change after EU accession. *West European Politics*, 35(1), 20–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2012.631311>
- Shandra, J. M., Esparza, L. E., & London, B. (2012). Nongovernmental organizations, democracy, and deforestation: Across-national analysis. *Society & Natural Resources*, 25(3), 251–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2011.573841>
- Soos, G. (2003). Local government reforms and the capacity for local governance in Hungary. *Reforming Local Government in Europe: Closing the Gap between Democracy and Efficiency*, 241–260.
- Surubaru, N.-C. (2020). European funds in Central and Eastern Europe: Drivers of change or mere funding transfers? Evaluating the impact of European aid on national and local development in Bulgaria and Romania. *European Politics and Society*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2020.1729049>
- Századvég. (2018). *A hazai víziközmű-szolgáltatás aktuális helyzete*. [http://www.maviz.org/system/files/szazadvég\\_tanulmány\\_-\\_a\\_hazai\\_vizikozmu-szolgáltatás\\_aktuális\\_helyzete\\_2018\\_2008\\_2006.pdf](http://www.maviz.org/system/files/szazadvég_tanulmány_-_a_hazai_vizikozmu-szolgáltatás_aktuális_helyzete_2018_2008_2006.pdf).
- Szikra, D. (2014). Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24(5), 486–500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928714545446>
- Tanács, I. (2010, January 25). *Romániából importált ivóvizet Békés megye. Népszabadság*. [http://www.nol.hu/archivum/20100125-aradi\\_ivovizexport\\_bekesbe](http://www.nol.hu/archivum/20100125-aradi_ivovizexport_bekesbe)
- Toshkov, D. (2008). Embracing European Law: Compliance with EU Directives in Central and Eastern Europe. *European Union Politics*, 9(3), 379–400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116508093490>
- Turnock, D. (2001). Environmental problems and policies in East Central Europe: A changing agenda. *GeoJournal*, 54(3/4), 485–505. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021780609487>
- Vachudová, M. A. (2005). *Europe undivided: Democracy, leverage, and integration after communism*. Oxford University Press.
- Varga, M. (2021). The return of economic nationalism to East Central Europe: Right-wing intellectual milieus and anti-liberal resentment. *Nations and Nationalism*, 27(1), 206–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12660>
- Varsányi, I., Fodré, Z., & Bartha, A. (1991). Arsenic in drinking water and mortality in the Southern Great Plain, Hungary. *Environmental Geochemistry and Health*, 13(1), 14–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF01783491>
- von Stein, J. (forthcoming). Democracy, Autocracy, and Everything in Between: How Domestic Institutions Affect Environmental Protection. *British Journal of Political Science*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342000054X>
- Voszka, É. (2018). Nationalisation in Hungary in the post-crisis years: A specific twist on a European trend? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(8), 1281–1302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1457137>
- Wollmann, H., Koprić, I., & Marcou, G. (2016). *Public and social services in Europe: From public and municipal to private sector provision*. Springer.
- World Bank (1999). *Hungary On the road to the European Union, A world bank country study*.
- Zhelyazkova, A., Kaya, C., & Schrama, R. (2017). Notified and substantive compliance with EU law in enlarged Europe: Evidence from four policy areas. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(2), 216–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1264084>