

Endre Sik (TARKI, Hungary) tells us about what the team have been up to over the Spring...



### Which work package have you been involved?

We were involved in two WPs – [WP4](#) and [WP5](#). In WP4 we provided a standard country report. By standard I mean designed according to the concept of the lead authors and they had a clear idea of what they wanted us to do. In the Hungarian context the fieldwork was very much limited which I'll talk about later.

In WP5 TARKI wrote a country report on the politicisation of the crisis in Hungary ([http://ceaseval.eu/publications/08\\_BognarSik\\_Suranyi\\_The\\_case\\_of\\_Hungary.pdf](http://ceaseval.eu/publications/08_BognarSik_Suranyi_The_case_of_Hungary.pdf)) and had a task of its own which was the methodology of the quantitative comparative analysis of the politicisation process of the Refugee Crisis. Due to the lack of funds and expertise we had to scale down our ambitions to prepare a sophisticated comparative analysis, but I think the analysis we did was correct and useful.

But since I wasn't satisfied with the sophistication of the quantitative analysis (one of my several negative features is over-ambition), we decided that as Hungary was tasked to do a more complex quantitative analysis anyway, we develop a dataset which I think is useful for frame and for further critical discourse analysis. So we developed a huge new dataset and we started to analyse them. We will do at least three perhaps five working papers with the intention to give an illustration how could such content analysis be done. Moreover, the data set we developed and the analyses we carried out may provide examples for EU authorities which should, in my view, do something more coordinated on media analysis because the media is getting more and more powerful and therefore the development of a longitudinal dataset which makes discourse analysis of the media possible should be a core project for the future for the EU.

## Could you tell me more about the dataset, what's included?

In short, it's huge, meaning it contains 43,000 articles, about 8 million words and it covers almost the entire period between 2015 and 2019. Our idea was to analyse the details of the content and the discourse of the refugee crisis, how it has changed during this period, what are the arguments (pros and cons), how the discourse use the wording and various metaphors to frame the discourse according to their intentions. Up until now we came out with two papers: one on the main results and the methodological details of the content analysis of the Hungarian media during the refugee crisis (<http://www.tarki.hu/index.php/eng/ceaseval-working-paper-first-results-content-analysis-media-course-migration-crisis-hungary-endre>) and one on the discourse on relocation quota in Hungary (<http://www.tarki.hu/index.php/eng/ceaseval-working-paper-sociological-characteristics-discourse-relocation-quotas-hungary-endre-sik>)

## What's been some of the key findings from WP5 for the Hungary case?

As mentioned earlier, the comparative analysis was rather reduced but even so it came up with a negative but important message for the EU – that top down communication from Brussels is not challenging enough for the media in the Member States. We found that the relocation quota related decisions in Brussels usually weren't really mentioned in the mainstream local media, except when it fitted into their own intentions. For example when the Hungarian government abused it to show how incompetent Brussels is and how dangerous can be such efforts for the sovereignty of Hungary.

The results of the comparative analysis was that during the summer and autumn of 2015 when the Balkan route in Eastern Europe (towards Austria and Germany) was wide open, this was the main era when the refugee crisis was discussed very often in every Member State media. In other words it is not the top-down EU communications but the opposite, i.e. when the real stories happen which appear in the media.

## What sources were used for the dataset?

Online media. What wasn't covered was printed media and social media. So there were relevant missing elements. However, the huge size of the dataset gives us a very reliable basis to make some generalisations. We selected those media that had the largest audience to maximise the coverage of our analysis as well as some smaller media outlets which have a very targeted right wing audience.

## What were the main differences in the framing of the crisis?

I can only mention one example at this stage of our analysis. The main culprit of all the negative elements going on Hungary as far as the refugee crisis is concerned is George Soros. He is a billionaire but a liberal one and has helped the civil society for decades in Hungary and therefore a good target for hate mongering. Therefore when the government initiated the repeated and wide scale anti-migrant propaganda campaign in mid-2015 pressing he was soon selected to be the main target of the centralized moral panic generating actions (together with Brussels, the

UN, and the civil society). But this manipulation was started always in the governmental media and has always been significantly stronger than in the independent media. Soros has been made the culprit of the world conspiracy against Hungary, Europe, Christian values and the safety of the European population.

### **Can you explain your concept of the moral panic button?**

The moral panic is when people are afraid that the world they are familiar with disappear, and what replaces it is ruled by values alien to or even disgusting for them. One type of moral panic is when an elite starts a discourse in the media, and in the course of discussions they use framing techniques to persuade the man of the street that there are ideas, groups, trends which endanger their values. That's a simple type of moral panic. We talk about moral panic button when these discourses are initiated by a centralised authority, a government. Moreover the repeated pressing of such a moral panic button assumes long term organisation and coordination, should be heavily financed. All types of media is used in this concentrated propaganda effort, but the manipulation uses isn't institutions beyond the media such as fake national consultations or information campaigns. These forms of manipulations are especially effective since the letters or fake public opinion questionnaires are sent to every households. So it's not just the media through which the population is manipulated but the manipulation actually crosses the threshold of your home. You get a letter from the PM with his picture explaining to you why the migrant issue is important and why you are endangered by them, and that it is only he and his government that can defend you. The moral panic button reaches its fully fledged shape when the previously outlined centralized manipulation lasts for years and include referendum and elections as well. So again and again the whole population reads the same messages which use simple stereotypes, simple scapegoating techniques, finely tuned frames, on the radio, on the billboards by the road, and in all the online media. And it is repeated again and again and therefore influences the whole country. Up until now we identified seventeen pressing of the moral panic button in Hungary.

### **What have been the methodological challenges with WP4?**

Well I don't think Hungary is unique having problems to do successful interviews with the representatives of the migration authorities. Partners from Italy and Turkey reported similar problems. Essentially in the past few years, governments often have come to power by using anti-migration rhetoric, and have therefore made it difficult to get access to state officials to give interviews for "suspicious" interviewers. NGOs are of course happy to be interviewed but not state officials. When we approached the state authorities we were either ignored or rejected. To do anthropological fieldwork at the border proved to be impossible because since early 2016 in Hungary there is a martial law that closed the southern (i.e. the Serbian) border. No one is allowed to go there and definitely not to make interviews. Plus there is a new law that says that if you house irregular migrants or work for NGOs who assist irregular migrants then it is a crime. Under these circumstances I couldn't ask my student to go to the borders.

**What would be the main conclusions or recommendations to the EU on the basis of the dataset?**

On the one hand the media is getting more complex and more influential in the era of fake news and intentional (and very professional) use of framing. Everything related to sensitive issues such as migration is now in the hands of spin-doctors. The EU should find out how to communicate with ordinary people. In addition to Eurobarometer surveys A longitudinal database of all forms of media is in my opinion a reliable source if the EU wants to know how people will think of the different policies.