

## “AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE”

### A Critical Linguistic Analysis of the 2022 Political Program of the “United for Hungary” Alliance

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#### 1. Introduction

In the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary election, for the first time since the accession of the right-wing Fidesz party to power in Hungary and after an almost uninterrupted twelve-year period of an absolute Fidesz majority in the Hungarian parliament, “opposition” political parties and their respective leading figures agreed to join forces and run united under one banner. This alliance of political forces, named “United for Hungary” [*Egységben Magyarországért*], included most of the traditional Hungarian political spectrum, from the old centre-left Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) to the extreme right-wing party Jobbik. These parties claimed that dissatisfaction with the Fidesz regime was rife and that they would be able to defeat Viktor Orbán and his party at the polls through a joint candidacy. However, their ultimate electoral failure led to a consolidation of the so-called “illiberal” status quo in Hungarian parliamentary politics.

In this paper, I will analyze part of the “Only Upwards!” [*Csak Felfelé!*] opposition’s program that was published right before the April 2022 election.<sup>1</sup> The ultimate questions my paper intends to answer are the following: How did the opposition movement “United for Hungary” represent a “desirable” education in their political program for the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary election? How did the opposition’s discourse concur with or differ from the dominant neoliberal discourse? To what extent can the pledges formulated in the program explain the electoral defeat of the opposition and the consolidation of the Fidesz-led status quo in April 2022?

To answer these questions, I am first going to situate the opposition movement “United for Hungary” in the broader Hungarian electoral, ideological and political-economic contexts of the period following the 1989-91 demise of “actually existing socialism.” In the words of Adam Fabry, this period represented a transition from “state capitalism to authoritarian neoliberalism” in Hungary<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> *Egységben Magyarországért*, “Csak Felfelé! Az emelkedő Magyarország programja” (Budapest, 2022). The text is available upon request from the author.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary: From State Capitalism to Authoritarian Neoliberalism* (New York, NY: Palgrave Pivot, 2019).

is embedded in the broader neoliberal restructuring of the global capitalist system that had started in the late 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Second, I am going to develop a critical linguistic analysis of the political program, identifying the key themes presented and the ideas that cluster around them<sup>4</sup> and how these come to be encoded as “desirable” through value assumptions.<sup>5</sup> The agency of the social actors accounted for in the text, either as authors or as participants in transitivity processes,<sup>6</sup> will also be considered with regard to revealing who comes to be identified as actual political agents in the construction of the so-called “future” of the country.

## 2. The Hungarian neoliberal restructuring in context

By the end of the 1960s, so-called “embedded liberalism,”<sup>7</sup> consisting of the common acceptance by liberal states that a class compromise between capital and labor was the best way to achieve social peace, started to collapse. According to David Harvey, the main recognizable aspect of “embedded liberalism” was the overarching prominence of welfare state protections over market processes. States heavily regulated the economy and even kept entire strategic industrial branches in their control, such as the car manufacturer Renault, nationalized by the French government after World War II and privatized as late as the mid-1990s.<sup>8</sup> By the late-1970s, faced with an increasing political threat from the laboring classes, upper classes in many different countries pushed for an increase in state control in their *own* interest (the restoration of the conditions for capital accumulation) through forced privatizations and fiscal reforms,<sup>9</sup> which became central features of what came to be called “neoliberalization” of the economy. Neoliberalization took place across very different socio-economic contexts and class configurations, from the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile in the 1970s to the state-led “shock therapy” class formation in post-Soviet Russia in the early 1990s<sup>10</sup> through

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<sup>3</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Fran Tonkiss, “Analysing Discourse,” in *Researching Society and Culture*, edited by Clive Seale (London, UK: Sage, 2004), 245-60.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> M. A. K. Halliday, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> V. A. Schmidt, “Privatization in France: The Transformation of French Capitalism,” *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 17, no. 4 (1999): 445-61.

<sup>9</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, 1st ed (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 219.

the shifting social alliances of the French dominant classes across the past forty years.<sup>11</sup>

In Hungary, the political and economic crisis of “Soviet-style capitalism” in the 1980s saw the domestic emergence of neoliberal practices. The Hungarian neoliberal reform paradigm was developed by the Financial Research Institute (FRI) at the Ministry of Finance in the mid-1980s. Some of the members of the FRI, for instance, György Matolcsy or Lajos Bokros, still have influence in today’s political scene: the former still (as of November 2022, and since 2013) serving as head of the Hungarian Central Bank (MNB), while the latter still being present in the economic and mediatic debate<sup>12</sup> after serving as finance minister in the early 1990s, as a consultant to the IMF and the World Bank, and as an economics professor at the Central European University.<sup>13</sup> The FRI’s prescriptions, argues Fabry, “converged around the idea that ‘actually existing socialism’ was irreparable and needed massive, immediate, and wholesale reforms, which could only be achieved by introducing a (free) market economy and democratic reforms.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, the FRI published their reform program in 1987, entitled “Turnabout and Reform” [*Fordulat és reform*].<sup>15</sup> The document depicted a sad state of the Hungarian economy and attributed it to the inherent failures of the state-socialist system.<sup>16</sup> The authors drew their inspiration from the neoliberal ideology as formulated by Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman and proposed measures such as “the deregulation of markets in order to facilitate export-led growth, the pursuit of restrictive fiscal policy, and privatization of state-owned enterprises.”<sup>17</sup>

Although the FRI was dissolved in 1987, the FRI’s program became economic common sense in the post-1989 Hungarian intellectual landscape and shaped subsequent economic policies. According to Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary managed to attract a large amount of foreign investment thanks to low taxes and to their position in the close

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<sup>11</sup> Bruno Amable, Elvire Guillaud, and Stefano Palombarini, “Changing French Capitalism: Political and Systemic Crises in France,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 19, no. 8 (2012): 1168-87.

<sup>12</sup> Klubrádió, “Bokros Lajos: A gazdasági válság legfőbb okozója a kormány,” September 30, 2022.

<https://www.klubradio.hu/adasok/bokros-lajos-a-gazdasagi-valsag-legfobb-okozoja-a-kormany-129608>.

<sup>13</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Fabry, “The Origins of Neoliberalism in Late ‘Socialist’ Hungary: The Case of the Financial Research Institute and ‘Turnabout and Reform,’” *Capital and Class* 42, no. 1 (2018): 77-107.

<sup>16</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 61.

periphery to the EU core.<sup>18</sup> This led to an industrial restructuring emphasizing the production of goods, such as automobiles. In the case of Hungary, such restructuring was due to the large amount of external debt accumulated by the Kádár regime in the 1980s, debt that was paid back via large-scale privatizations and exports.<sup>19</sup> However, the neoliberal regime of production and accumulation implemented during the 1990s turned out to be fraught with contradictions, mainly because of its dependence on foreign investments. Indeed, to generate a high return on investment, labor needed to be disciplined via the formation of an “industrial reserve army of labor,”<sup>20</sup> which led to the loss of more than 1.3 million jobs between 1990 and 1995<sup>21</sup> in Hungary. Soaring unemployment had devastating consequences for the regions in Northeastern Hungary and the Roma population.<sup>22</sup> These consequences were also heavily gendered, channeling women towards low-paying and unstable service-sector jobs in significant proportions.<sup>23</sup>

The financial crisis of 2008 led to a substantial fall in the national GDP (gross domestic product), a private debt crisis and a fall in exports and FDI (foreign direct investment).<sup>24</sup> These, in turn, prompted the MSZP government to request a 25-billion-dollar bailout package from the IMF, the EU and the World Bank, given under the condition of austerity measures such as cuts in public spending and tax increases.<sup>25</sup> This package was followed in 2009 by deeper austerity measures, including a “two-year pay freeze for public sector workers, an increase in VAT from 20 to 25 percent ... pension cuts, a decrease in maternity leave, and a reduction in state subsidies for residential heating.”<sup>26</sup> These measures were followed by a public backlash against neoliberal capitalism, the EU, and politics in general, channeled by conservatives in Fidesz-KDNP and Jobbik, who eventually replaced the MSZP-led government after the elections of April 2010.<sup>27</sup>

However, this did not represent the end of neoliberal politics in Hungary. Since their accession to power in 2010, the Fidesz-KDNP governments, under the lead

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<sup>18</sup> Dorothee Bohle and Bela Greskovits, *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 165.

<sup>19</sup> Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits, “The State, Internationalization, and Capitalist Diversity in Eastern Europe,” *Competition and Change* 11, no. 2 (2007): 89-115.

<sup>20</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Dena Ringold, Mitchell A. Orenstein, and Erika Wilkens, “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle,” World Bank Publications (The World Bank Group, 2005), <https://econpapers.repec.org/bookchap/wbkwbpubs/14869.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Gal and Kligman Gail, “Dilemmas of Public and Private,” in *The Politics of Gender After Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 60.

<sup>24</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 114.

<sup>26</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 117.

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of Viktor Orban, implemented substantial reforms in line with neoliberal policies. For example, as Adam Fabry summarizes, in mid-2010, the regime introduced

a highly regressive, 16 percent “flat tax” on personal income; state subsidies for small- and medium-sized Hungarian firms (in agriculture, car manufacturing, construction, food processing, and the tourism industry); and tax benefits to families of well-earning working parents with children. Two years later, it raised VAT to 27 percent—the highest level in the EU, and one of the highest in the world. [It also introduced] a sweeping new Labour Law that promotes further flexibilization of labour relations while restricting workers’ rights to strike action. Also, the regime has expanded a highly punitive and super-exploitative workfare programme originally introduced by the Bajnai government in 2009. According to the programme, unemployed people are forced to carry out hard labour for local authorities (often under the supervision of the police).<sup>28</sup>

However, Paolo Gerbaudo argues about the relationship between the nationalist right (of which the party Fidesz is one of the European archetypes) and neoliberalism that, although it is still in line with neoliberal tenets, it symbolically departs from the neoliberal consensus on social and cultural issues. For instance, similarly to other national populists, Viktor Orban has adopted a “communitarian discourse infused with xenophobia, misogyny and chauvinism, as a means to intercept the growing anger and resentment of disgruntled workers and the declining middle class,”<sup>29</sup> using the term “illiberal democracy” in 2014 to refer to Hungary under his regime.<sup>30</sup>

In the educational field, neoliberal policies and social practices shape, and are shaped by, a particular kind of language and a particular set of values and ideas, or, to use James Paul Gee’s terminology, specific situated meanings come to be associated with, and are routinized in, neoliberal discourse.<sup>31</sup> For example, educational discourse reflects its increasing commodification, i.e., the growing dominance of market relations of exchange value and competition in the educational field, with a foregrounding of promotional, conversational, and

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<sup>28</sup> Fabry, *The Political Economy of Hungary*, 135.

<sup>29</sup> Paolo Gerbaudo, *The Great Recoil: Politics after Populism and Pandemic* (New York: Verso, 2021), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Wodak, “Entering the ‘Post-Shame Era.’ The Rise of Illiberal Democracy, Populism and Neo-Authoritarianism in Europe,” *Global Discourse* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 195–213.

<sup>31</sup> James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 50.

technological functions of language.<sup>32</sup> Due to neoliberalism's emphasis on competition in all forms of human interactions,<sup>33</sup> the educational system needs to teach subjects how to adapt better to the generalized competition to improve one's employability. One symptom of this transformation is the increased importance of professionalization in the curricula, which subordinates knowledge acquisition to the acquisition of a normalized behavior supposedly common to all professional situations. This normalized behavior can be summarized by the concept of *transversal skills*.<sup>34</sup> According to Wendy Brown, neoliberal rationality also negates the relevance of the democratic public sphere: public goods such as education are "increasingly difficult to secure."<sup>35</sup> At the same time, citizens are transformed into investors or consumers instead of "members of a democratic polity."<sup>36</sup> Knowledge gets value only in so far as it can enhance the value of human capital; that is, knowledge is valued according to market metrics, "it is sought for positive ROI," or "return on investment."<sup>37</sup> We shall now turn to the following question: how much did neoliberal discourse permeate the aforementioned opposition program on education during the 2022 election, which saw the confrontation between a Fidesz party that had been holding state power for twelve years and an opposition that, for the first time, presented itself to the electoral battle in a united front?

### 3. "Only Upwards!" An analysis of the political program of the "United for Hungary" movement

The "Only Upwards!" document is composed of nine main units, each corresponding to a social field that the "United for Hungary" movement promises to change if they win the elections. For instance, Unit 1 is entitled "Recreation of the rule of law"<sup>38</sup> and focuses on legal and constitutional rights; Unit 2, "An investment in the future"<sup>39</sup> concentrates on educational issues; and while Unit 6 "Sustainable Hungary"<sup>40</sup> brings environmental issues to the foreground. The unit that will be analyzed in this paper is Unit 2, as its title already hints at the dominant neoliberal approach to education as a commodified social practice, a practice that

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<sup>32</sup> Norman Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketisation of Public Discourse: The Universities," in *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, edited by Norman Fairclough (London: Routledge, 2010), 97–99.

<sup>33</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 81.

<sup>34</sup> Christian Laval et al., *La nouvelle école capitaliste* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), 95.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 176.

<sup>36</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 176.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 176.

<sup>38</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, "Csak Felfelé!" 5. In the original title: "A jogállam újbóli megeremtése." All translations are provided by the author.

<sup>39</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, "Befektetés a jövőbe."

<sup>40</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, "Fenntartható Magyarország."

should produce knowledge with the broader aim of generating a “return on investment” rather than, for example, the development of critical citizens.

### 3.1. Key themes

The units are subdivided into several sub-units named after particular key themes related to the main unit. Because of the specific genre of the text, these key themes are *a priori* framed as desirable ideas to attain. Indeed, the political program reads like an additive list of objectives to attain and renders the propositions as self-evident facts beyond discussion only to be ticked similarly to a to-do list. The genre can be qualified as an instance of “genre of governance”<sup>41</sup> because of its paratactic format, inimical to argumentation, and because it recontextualizes elements of certain social practices. In the specific case of the document, particular ways of doing/representing education are recontextualized into a political program. Through various discursive means, the program is supposed to convince voters that the ideas that will be the governing ones once state power is achieved are “good” ideas. In other words, genres of governance sustain relations between different social practices (education, business, electoral politics) and between different scales (the global, the European, the national, the local).

The key themes presented in the document are generally noun phrases, for instance, the main unit title “An investment in the future” mentioned above. Although noun phrases are nominalizations of processes involving human actors and agency, they do not contain any information about the actual actors supposed to be “investing” in the “future,” for what purposes, nor about whose “future” is being discussed. The noun phrase “An investment in the future” simply relies on a value assumption<sup>42</sup> that investments are a “good” thing and a condition for a “desirable” future without giving any more details. The relationship between nominalizations and ideology in the text should be emphasized, as nominalizations abstract ideas from the actual social processes and human actions they are supposed to represent. Gee makes an analogy between nominalizations and “trash compactors,” because they include “a whole sentence’s worth of information,” and it is hard to tell from the compacted item what kind of information went in it.<sup>43</sup> The authors of the document turn processes (verbs) into things (nouns); thus, they reify social relations. This is an ideological endeavor in Marx’s sense of the term. Indeed, as Sara Carpenter and Shahrzad Mojab explain, human activities (processes) are dialectical as they do not only happen in language or in the mind but are also embedded in the material conditions in which we live.<sup>44</sup> By abstracting or reifying social processes from the actual human relations that constitute them,

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<sup>41</sup> Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, 56.

<sup>43</sup> Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Sara Carpenter and Mojab Shahrzad, *Revolutionary Learning: Marxism, Feminism and Knowledge* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 6.

the document's authors actively construct ideological meanings, the purpose of which is to reify the neoliberal social order and naturalize it as the norm.

Each sub-unit title associated with the general theme of education is followed by a few explanatory paragraphs that see the mobilization of specific positively valued assumptions and their association with the specific key theme in question.<sup>45</sup> The main key theme in Sub-unit 2.1, "Opportunity-creating public education"<sup>46</sup> is associated with "knowledge" that is "following best practices," "useful," "modern," "available for everyone;" that "allows" the "unfolding" of the "youth's diversity of abilities and talents" so that they can obtain "the needed skills for a successful life and work."<sup>47</sup> Here, the possession of a particular type of knowledge is associated with the opportunity for individual success in professional life, whose condition is the development of individual qualities such as talents. The authors do not explain what makes knowledge "modern" or "useful." Still, its association with the job market suggests that appropriate knowledge is knowledge of immediate relevance to the interests of the employers. Moreover, the expression "best practices" is a common term in corporate culture that has been recontextualized in educational discourse. Christian W. Chun argues that "best practices" entail the measurement, assessment and evaluation of "outputs" in accordance "with manufacturing-based standards of production."<sup>48</sup> That is, appropriate knowledge is represented not only as "useful" for corporate interests, but its very production and circulation should be based on quantifiable criteria: knowledge *is* and *must* be commodified.

Sub-unit 2.2 calls for a "Free, open and quality higher education." To this end, higher education institutions should, for instance, receive "autonomy in teaching, researching, organizing and financing."<sup>49</sup> Academic freedom, a broadly desirable endeavour, especially considering the recent privatizations in Hungarian academia,<sup>50</sup> is put on the same level as the supposed "freedom" to find sources of

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<sup>45</sup> Tonkiss, "Analysing Discourse," 413.

<sup>46</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, "Csak Felfelé!" 16. "Esélyteremtő közoktatás."

<sup>47</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, "Csak Felfelé!" 16. "Célunk, hogy a jelenlegi rendszert gyökeresen átalakítva a legjobb példákat követő, használható, korszerű, mindenki számára elérhető tudást biztosító oktatást hozzunk létre, olyat, amely lehetővé teszi a fiatalok sokoldalú képességének és tehetségének kibontakoztatását, a sikeres élethez és munkavégzéshez szükséges kompetenciák megalapozását, valamint támogatja személyiségük fejlődését."

<sup>48</sup> Christian W. Chun, "Exploring Neoliberal Language, Discourses and Identities," in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*, edited by Siân Preece (London: Routledge, 2016), 558.

<sup>49</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, "Csak Felfelé!" 17. "Szabad, nyitott és minőségi felsőoktatás. A felsőoktatási intézmények oktatási, kutatási, szervezeti és gazdálkodási autonómiát kapnak."

<sup>50</sup> Corentin Léotard and Thomas Laffitte, "Hungary's Fidesz Builds a Parallel State," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 2021, English edition.



funding. This assumption has been questioned and resisted by various actors in the academic world across the European Union, for example, in France during the 2007 movement against Nicolas Sarkozy’s university reform.<sup>51</sup> The reform aimed at withdrawing substantial state funding from universities under the justification of “autonomy,” thus pushing universities to compete with each other to find alternative sources of financing while opening governing boards to (non-academic) corporate members.<sup>52</sup> According to David Harvey, the multiple meanings and interpretations of the term “freedom” have been helpful for neoliberals in the past decades to justify the privatization of public goods and the reduction of “freedom” to “freedom of the market” in the interests of the capitalist class.<sup>53</sup> Hence, “free,” “open” and “quality” higher education implies, in this case, a very neoliberal representation of education whose “openness” to corporate interests and whose “freedom” to compete on a free market are two preconditions upon which will depend its quality.

The desirability of “modern vocational and adult training” is emphasized by Sub-unit 2.3.<sup>54</sup> In this section, the authors develop what “modern” entails and frame it within the boundaries of the vocational education curriculum. The curriculum should aim at transmitting “general knowledge,” “IT knowledge,” and “basic skills” and at developing the “unique talents of students.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, “vocational institutions” will be “autonomous” yet obliged to organize internships centered on the needs of “companies and corporations.”<sup>56</sup> Adult training consists of providing access to “modern” and “practical” methods for language learning to “people living in disadvantaged territories” while “providing public IT training and opportunities” to “eradicate digital illiteracy.”<sup>57</sup> There is a strong association between “modernity” and information technologies in the text. Vocational education should transmit individual and decontextualized technological basic skills to individual (“unique”) students so that they can efficiently adapt to their employers’ needs, whether for their practice or generally. Technological solutions

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<sup>51</sup> “Student Protesters Raise the Heat in France,” *The New York Times*, November 27, 2007, sec. World.

<sup>52</sup> “FRANCE: Government Fast-Tracks Autonomy Law,” *University World News*, October 14, 2007. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20071009145043104>.

<sup>53</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 38.

<sup>54</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelé!” 18. “Korszerű szakképzés és felnőttképzés.”

<sup>55</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelé!” 18. “Lehetővé tesszük, hogy a szakképzés minden intézménytípusa a kívánatos óraszámában és jól adaptálható tantervek szerint biztosítsa az általános műveltséghez, a nyelvi és informatikai tudáshoz, az alapképességek fejlesztéséhez, a tanuló egyéni képességeinek kibontakoztatásához szükséges feltételeket.”

<sup>56</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelé!” 18. “Visszaállítjuk a szakképző intézmények szakmai önállóságát. Elengedhetetlen, hogy a vállalatokat, cégeket érdekeltté tegyük a gyakorlati képzésben.”

<sup>57</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelé!” 18. “A digitális analfabetizmus felszámolásáért közösségi informatikai lehetőségeket és képzést biztosítunk minden településen.”

are also articulated as the solution to inequalities. In this example, inequalities are represented as “regional,” some regions being less “advantaged” than others. The actual causes of such disparities of “advantages” and “disadvantages” are inferred to be the lack of (basic) education and the presence of “digital illiteracy,” at the expense of any other explanation that would consider the macro social and economic policies of the Hungarian state of the past few decades.

### 3.2. Social actors

Alongside the value assumptions clustering around the key themes mentioned, particular social actors are represented as the actual agents of constructing a better “future.” M.A.K. Halliday’s category of transitivity<sup>58</sup> and Theo Van Leeuwen’s category of “social actors”<sup>59</sup> are relevant to analyzing processes, participants, and circumstances to understand how various “*whos doing whats*” are represented in language and what roles are given to whom in the representation of human activities. I shall consider what processes are the most frequent in the “Only Upwards” document and who the social actors involved are.

Material processes are the overwhelmingly dominant type of processes in the unit “An investment in the future.” Instances of material processes in the section “Opportunity-creating public education” are: “let’s create,” “we create,” “let’s support,” “let’s guarantee,” “we ensure,” “let’s ensure,” “let’s modernize,” “let’s prepare,” “we make possible again,” “let’s reinforce,” “let’s reduce,” “let’s push back,” “let’s reinstate,” “let’s renew,” or “let’s stop.”<sup>60</sup> The processes mainly involve a collective “we” that is in charge of acting towards the desirable goals analyzed in the section above. Also, some of these processes convey positive, common sense values or trigger positive value judgements, for instance, “modernization.” On the one hand, processes such as “to make something possible,” “to create something,” or “to ensure something” encode the goal as desirable; on the other, “let’s stop” frames the goal as undesirable. The collective “we” exclusively expresses the authors of the document at the expense of the broader voter, or even educational, community: the authors only very rarely involve other participants as actors. The only example of a social actor in a material process other than the participants in the opposition movement to be found in Sub-unit 2.1 is the following: “let those decide, who know about children: parents

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<sup>58</sup> Halliday, *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 216.

<sup>59</sup> Theo Van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.

<sup>60</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelél!” 16-17. Respectively: “hozzunk létre,” “hozzunk létre,” “támogatjuk,” “garantáljuk,” “biztosítunk,” “biztosítsunk,” “modernizáljuk,” “felkészítsünk,” “újra lehetővé tesszük,” “megerősítjük,” “csökkentjük,” “visszaszorítjuk,” “visszaállítjuk,” “megújítjuk,” “megszüntetjük.”

and kindergarten teachers.”<sup>61</sup> Teachers are mentioned once more, this time in a subordinate clause whose actors are still the authors of the documents: “Let’s renew the teacher-training program so that every teacher obtains personalized, differentiated and skill-development-centered modern and digital competencies.”<sup>62</sup> Even if the process “to obtain” is material, teachers are inferred to be relatively passive participants in it. Indeed, the process seems to be actively controlled by the actual “renewers” of the teacher-training program, who are the theme of the sentence’s main clause.

In the same sub-unit, the authors represent a particular “past” as desirable, framed by the processes “let’s push back” (occurring twice) and “let’s reinstate” (occurring four times). “We make possible again” implies that something has been rendered impossible but only temporarily. From the goals of the process, it is possible to interpret the desirable past as the period before Fidesz took control of state power and implemented its policies. For example, “let’s reinstate” is associated with the following desirable goals, respectively: “Let’s reinstate the obligation to attend school to the age of eighteen,” “Let’s reinstate the professional independence of schools and teachers,” “Let’s reinstate the freedom of the choice of textbook,” and “Let’s reinstate the guarantee keeping salaries stable in value.”<sup>63</sup> Because such desirable goals are now framed as being part of a past situation that only has to be restored, rather than simply being a pledge to future improvements of the educational system, what comes to be foregrounded is the identity of the authors as the ones in charge to reset the educational situation to before what seems to be represented as a (long) Fidesz interlude. Triggering nostalgic longing for a lost past to criticize the present situation is not a bad or a good thing in itself; temporal direction does not constitute a political ideology per se.<sup>64</sup> However, as explained above, living in pre-Fidesz Hungary was at no point close to living in a utopia for the majority of the Hungarian population. Trying to evoke nostalgic feelings in a political program often has ambiguous and unpredictable affective impacts. Since nostalgia “is invariably open to different kinds of interpretation and response,”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelé!” 16-17. “Az iskolaérettségről újra azok döntsenek, akik ismerik a gyereket: szülők és az óvodapedagógusok.”

<sup>62</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelé!” 16-17. “Megújítjuk a pedagógusképzés és -továbbképzés rendszerét, hogy minden pedagógus megszerezhesse a személyre szabott, differenciált és a készségek fejlesztésére fókuszáló, modern pedagógiai és digitális kompetenciákat.”

<sup>63</sup> Egységben Magyarországért, “Csak Felfelé!” 16-17. “Visszaállítjuk a 18 éves korig tartó tankötelezettséget,” “Visszaállítjuk az iskolák és pedagógusok szakmai önállóságát;” “Helyreállítjuk a tankönyvválasztás szabadságát;” “Helyreállítjuk a bérek értékállóságát biztosító garanciát.”

<sup>64</sup> Michael Kenny, “Back to the Populist Future? Understanding Nostalgia in Contemporary Ideological Discourse,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 22, no. 3 (September 2, 2017): 256–73.

<sup>65</sup> Kenny, “Back to the Populist,” 15.

it also runs the risk of alienating voters for whom the unpleasant memories of the past still prevail.

#### 4. Conclusion

The analysis of the educational part of “Only Upwards,” the political program of the “United for Hungary” opposition movement, intended to partially explain, through a critical linguistic approach, the electoral defeat of the united opposition front against Viktor Orban’s Fidesz party during the April 2022 elections. The text, recontextualizing particular discourses in a political program, can be considered an instance of “genre of governance.” The particular discourses recontextualized are embedded in neoliberal systems of values, where the economic and commodified dimension of education is framed as desirable or at least unavoidable, where educational successes are explained by the qualities of individual educational actors, where freedom is framed in economic terms and where educational policy is reduced to a technical endeavor. However, the authors of the document are self-identifying as the actual agents responsible for the adaptation to the so-called modern world, but, contradictorily to their claims to “modernity,” also argue that they will be undertaking a restoration of an idealized, pre-Fidesz past. The analysis argued that due to the simultaneous recontextualization of the neoliberal discourse, dominant since the early days of the Reagan- and Thatcher-lead governments in the USA and the UK, respectively, and the appeal to nostalgic feelings in voters supposedly enthusiastic about putting an end to the 12-year reign of Viktor Orban’s governments, the political program of the opposition movement lacked a certain appeal to the majority of voters called to the polls. Whether an actual anti-neoliberal agenda would have been more successful in the Hungarian context remains an enigma. The example of France, where elections were held during the same period in the spring of 2022, and where the political alliance “La France Insoumise” (LFI) under the leadership of Jean-Luc Mélenchon reached the third place (21.95% of voters cast their ballots for LFI, 27.85% for the right-wing Emmanuel Macron and 23.15% for the extreme-right Marine Le Pen<sup>66</sup>) with a resolutely anti-neoliberal, social-democratic program, seems to suggest that in order to succeed in the ballot box, any opposition to right-wing political forces has to break with the neoliberal political heritage.

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<sup>66</sup> “Présidentielle 2022: Jean-Luc Mélenchon Termine Troisième Du Premier Tour Avec 21,95% Des Voix, Selon Les Résultats Définitifs.” *Franceinfo*, April 10, 2022. [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/presidentielle/resultats-presidentielle-2022-jean-luc-melenchon-termine-troisieme-du-premier-tour-avec-20-1-des-voix-selon-notre-estimation-ipsos-sopra-steria\\_5063749.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/presidentielle/resultats-presidentielle-2022-jean-luc-melenchon-termine-troisieme-du-premier-tour-avec-20-1-des-voix-selon-notre-estimation-ipsos-sopra-steria_5063749.html).

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