

Promising Europe: EU Related Pledges and their Fulfilment in Hungarian Party Manifestos (1998–2010)

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Abstract

This study analyses the election manifestos of Hungarian parties in campaigns between 1998 and 2006, for the purpose of assessing the significance and nature of EU-related promises. Three campaigns and government terms are studied: one prior to EU accession, a second around the time Hungary became a Member State and the third after joining the EU. The study follows the mandate view of representative government and the pledge approach for exploring election manifestos. Three main categories of EU-related pledges are discussed: firstly, pledges related to values associated with the European Union, secondly, pledges on adaptation to its institutions, policies, and norms, and finally pledges that promised availability and use of EU funds. The findings are that only a small proportion of election pledges was EU-related, and few were specific enough to test their later fulfilment by governments. We maintain that our results show how undisputed the issue of Hungarian membership was before 2010. But this lack of EU-related conflicts diminished the information content of manifestos regarding accession.

Keywords: European Union; Hungary; party manifesto; pledge approach

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1. Introduction

In the time since the post-communist transition, European integration has never become a major theme of Hungarian party manifestos. This does not mean parties had nothing to offer on Europe or the European Union, simply that until and during the accession process, they did not find in European integration a divisive issue. As a post-communist country with no politically significant intention to question the direction of regime change, Hungary was pointed towards Euro-Atlantic integration. From 1990 on, its governments worked for the same goals: to join NATO and the EU. Once it had left behind the formal alliances of the Eastern Bloc

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— Comecon and the Warsaw Pact — the only alternative left for Hungary was to approach the West. Even the socialists, whose own party grew out of the old Communist Party, shared these goals.

Overall, the transition provided an answer to an age-old political dilemma: is Hungary's political and cultural home in the East or in the West (Szűcs 1983)? Once communism had collapsed, it was almost a historical necessity that for Hungary, democratization would mean a Western orientation, and the foreign doctrine followed by all Hungarian governments after the transition defined three priorities: (1) euro-Atlantic integration, (2) good relations with neighbouring countries, and (3) the support of Hungarian minorities inside those countries. This threefold doctrine was an island of peace inside the highly polarized Hungarian political environment, one in which all governments and political parties sought the same goals, even if they did debate the pace of change and the means of its implementation (Palonen 2009; Körösenyi 2013). But any differences were almost invisible in election manifestos that uniformly reassured voters of the parties' commitment to Europe and the advantages of integration.

The undisputed Euro-Atlantic orientation of the political elite initially harmonized with the attitudes of the vast majority of Hungarian voters. Those who were better informed had positive expectations about membership, trusting that political integration would be advantageous and bring economic progress. But after the 2004 accession, this same group grew gradually less contented (Lengyel, Göncz 2006). What is more worrying is that according to Eurobarometer, since 2002 the number of respondents who think that accession is favourable has fallen steadily (Göncz, Hegedüs 2013: 220).

On the one hand, European integration was about democratic values and political liberties. On the other, the European Union meant — or at least promised — the Western standard of living promoted by Hungarian parties and expected by the voters. No political party with any real potential to participate in the government took a stand against integration as a whole.¹ This consensus was reflected in the 2003 referendum on EU accession. Although only 45.62% of citizens cast a vote, the vast majority, 83.76%, voted in favour of Hungarian membership.²

Despite this absence of dispute, parties were usually expected to say something about the European Union and Hungary's accession to it during campaigns. EU membership was a topic on which it was impossible not to take a stand. Manifestos were important tools for talking about accession, mostly for stating its advantages. But what was their role and significance? Did they count?

To answer, we must start with the Hungarian political system. With the transition, Hungary adopted a parliamentary government whose focus of power is the relationship between the legislative and the executive. As in other parliamentary regimes, as the parliamentary majority slipped into the hands of centralized parties, the executive was resultingly strengthened. That is, the centre of power lies in the leadership of the party holding the majority of parliamentary seats. Although the elections were about choosing representatives, the campaigns increasingly became competitions between party leaders or candidates for the office of prime minister. A significant feature of the local political landscape is that Hungarian governments were formed by party coalitions, but this did not lead to instability, since coalition members were also part of a political bloc. From this, it followed that Hungarian governments were exceptionally stable, with no interim elections. When a new prime minister was elected in the middle of

a parliamentary term (as in 1993, 2004, and 2009), this was also managed by relatively stable political majorities with no opening of the boundaries of coalitions or political blocs.

The formal features of the Hungarian political system and the political context in the country has diminished the role played by election manifestos. Manifestos played only a secondary role in communicating with voters in campaigns. But they are nevertheless authoritative documents as sources of party intentions. They were read by journalists, political commentators, and political opponents looking for weak points to spin in the campaign. The relative insignificance of manifestos does not mean voters were simply choosing on the basis of personality and party, even if symbolic-ideological cleavages did play a determining role in the polarization of the Hungarian political spectrum. Policies were relevant, too, particularly pledges about state-run welfare services and improving voters' material circumstances. But such pledges were not buried in the rarely-read, sometimes lengthy documents, whose language was hardly accessible to the everyday voter (Soós, Dobos 2014). Campaigns highlighted the most persuasive pledges using flyers, billboards and the news media.

Limited significance or not, election manifestos do matter. Once written and published, all actors may employ them as points of reference — party members, journalists, political opponents, and the voters. What they leave out is as important as what they include. They have political relevance during the winning party's term in office; they serve as the basis of comparison between competing parties; and years later, they may still be invoked during debates. As the next section will show, overall an election manifesto forms the foundation of a government's mandate. It is an indispensable feature of its democratic legitimation. The question here is, what role did the European Union play in the mandate of Hungarian governments before, during, and after accession?

2. The Scope of the Study

On 1 May 2004, with nine other countries, Hungary joined the European Union. Only a few weeks later, the first European parliamentary elections were held. Taking what were virtually their first steps as EU citizens, Hungarian voters immediately came to realize that elections to the European Parliament are as much about national politics as they are about the European Union. However, in this study, we focus on EU-related pledges in manifestos issued at general elections.

Our study is limited to three successive elections, the first one being the last full term before the accession (1998), the second, the term during which Hungary closed the accession process by becoming a member of the EU (2002) and the third, the first full term as an EU member (2006). This limitation should give us a grasp of the changes that took place from the early preparation stage, through negotiations with Brussels, to the election of a government to represent the needs of a Member State within the EU's institutional frameworks. Clearly, the study could be extended to take in both earlier and later campaigns. But the 1998–2006 period in Hungary may be seen as one dominated by the polarized opposition of two political blocs that controlled nearly all aspects of the political field. Before 1998, the Fidesz-led right-wing bloc was just being established; after 2006, the left-wing bloc began to collapse.

As part of a broader research program to test the extent to which election pledges made from 1990 until 2010 have been fulfilled, this study focuses on pledges to do with the European Union. In this section, we first introduce the ‘Election Pledges and Public Policy in Hungary, 1990–2014’ research project³, carried out at the Institute for Political Science – CSS HAS, to explain the theoretical background of the study. Then the methodology of this study itself is discussed and its focus on EU-related pledges, before we move on to the empirical analysis in the next section.

In democratic theory, the concept of the election may be approached from two chief directions. Elections are conducted either to select decision-makers, representatives, and leaders on the basis of some set of credentials known to voters before they vote, or they are used as a means of evaluating the past governmental record. In other words, these approaches may be separated depending upon whether they emphasize the *ex-ante* or the *ex-post* aspect of authorizing governments. The first approach may be equated to giving a representative government a mandate; the second, to holding it accountable. It is under the first approach that campaign pledges are indispensable (Körösenyi, Sebök 2013a; 2013b). In the mandate view of representation, pledges partially constrain governmental actions and partially bear information voters need to help choose their representatives and, in a parliamentary institutional setting, the executive, as well, albeit indirectly.

In light of this, the issue of how many voters actually read campaign manifestos becomes secondary. Theoretically, these texts serve as the foundation of the government’s activity and, at the end of the term, any political assessment will be based upon how well the parties in government have adhered to their promises during the election campaign. The emphasis is not on how voters actually received these campaign promises, but on the omnipresent possibility that governmental activity may be measured against these previously stated pledges.

Of the two main approaches for dealing with campaign promises, our study follows the *pledge research* approach, as opposed to the *saliency* approach. The latter originates in the Comparative Manifesto Project, an international effort to collect and analyse election manifestos. Under the saliency approach, it is the emphasis on particular policy areas that reveals what goals a party will pursue in government (Budge et al. 1987; Budge, Hofferbert 1990; Hofferbert and Budge 1992; Budge, 2001). A content analysis of election manifestos — to be specific, a sentence count — is used to identify the emphases, and fulfilment is measured by comparing promises to budget expenditures related to them.

In contrast to the saliency approach, the *pledge research* approach is based upon the assumption that election manifestos contain distinct promises that signal a party’s future policies, and voters give their mandate to governmental action that is based upon these pledges. (Royed 1996; Royed, Borelli 1997; Thomson 2001; Artés, Bustos 2008; Costello, Thomson 2008; Mansergh, Thomson 2007; Thomson et al. 2010). However, as manifestos are seldom lists of clear-cut promises, the pledge approach divides the texts into quasi-sentences in order to separate ‘real’ pledges that are specific enough for their fulfilment to be measured and ‘rhetorical statements’ that cannot be measured by objective criteria (Royed 1996: 79–80). In other words, real pledges are testable promises that are clear enough to bear responsibility for future government action that also can be unequivocally identified.

Our study applies a dataset of Hungarian campaign promises made from 1990 until 2010 in order to explore the extent to which they are unequivocal — in the terminology of pledge

research, their ‘specificity’ and ‘fulfilment’. While the dataset was produced following the pledge research approach, the research itself, although it too adheres to pledge research when it comes to identifying promises and measuring their fulfilment, uses a more detailed methodology, to be presented in the next section.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Parties and Manifestos

We examined pledges from three Hungarian general elections: 1998 – the beginning of official negotiations on EU accession; 2002 – the last election before accession (in 2004); 2006 – the first election after accession. This distinction offered us the opportunity to analyse how the characteristics of EU-related pledges were shaped in a changing institutional and political context. Employing pledge research methodology, we examined the electoral manifestos of all parties that were members of the government following a given election and also the opposition party with the greatest vote share in that election. This case selection method allows the comparison of pledges by the most powerful governing party, its coalition partners, and the main opposition party. In the three terms between 1998 and 2010, ten cases met our criteria (Table 1).

Table 1: Governing and Opposition Parties in Hungary (1998–2010)

	Fidesz	MSZP	SZDSZ	MDF	FKgP
1998	government	opposition	–	government	government
2002	opposition	government	government	–	–
2006	opposition	government	government	–	–

Abbreviations:

Fidesz (Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Párt) – Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Party (centre-right)

MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt) – Hungarian Socialist Party (centre-left)

SZDSZ (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége) – Alliance of Free Democrats (liberal)

MDF (Magyar Demokrata Fórum) – Hungarian Democratic Forum (centre-right)

FKgP (Független Kisgazda Párt) – Independent Smallholders Party (right/populist)

Source: Authors.

However, not all parties had manifestos in each election. In nine out of ten cases, it is easy to identify manifestos published for the general elections. The only exception is SZDSZ in 2002, when the party had no election manifesto but referred during the campaign to a document that had been published two years previous. We did not consider this manifesto usable for the pledge research project, so instead we collected and analysed SZDSZ pledges from news media sources in 2002. These pledgers differ slightly from the manifesto pledges, mainly in terms of their formulation,⁴ but they are adequate to examine the characteristics of EU-related pledges.

3.2. Information Content and EU Topics

After identifying and evaluating the electoral manifestos, we analysed their content. Following the pledge approach, rather than dealing with sentences or paragraphs, we identified quasi-sentences that may be considered pledges. These quasi-sentences had to meet the following criteria:

- They had to include a *commitment* to a future government act – this separates pledges from statements, which merely contain information about the past or present state of the given policy field.
- They had to contain the promise that the party would carry out an action or would help to achieve a result –pledges are promises of a policy *output or outcome*.⁵

After identifying pledges, we separated EU related⁶ pledges from non-EU related promises. Our first hypothesis was that *the proportion of EU related pledges in manifestos constantly increased between 1998 and 2006* (H1). We assume that as Hungary became increasingly engaged in European integration, the EU's importance was emphasized more and more in the parties' manifestos. Our contention was that prior to the election in question, there would be no significant difference between the parties in government and opposition parties, since all had taken a pro-Europe stance, as European integration was not a divisive issue among them.

In our study, we use six categories of pledges with regard to the European Union:

- 1) *European values*: the pledge promises the achievement/introduction or respect of an abstract European value or norm.
- 2) *Adaptation*: the pledge is about harmonization with European directives, with adaptation to EU regulations and policies.
- 3) *EU funds*: the pledge is about using the resources provided by the European Union.
- 4) *Own EU agenda*: the pledge is about the party's aim to take action on the European level or to influence the operation of the European Union.
- 5) *Europe as a reference point*: the pledge promises the implementation of a national policy within the country with which the country will reach the European level development in the policy field in question.
- 6) *Non-EU related pledges*

In our study, we focus on pledges that belong to the first, second or third categories in order to unfold the nature of the mandate as it relates to the accession process. In other words, we have analysed pledges about what the European Union expects, requires or delivers and how a party pledges to meet the necessary conditions. In contrast to this, categories in the other group might be EU-independent, even if they contain references to it. In the EU vocabulary, the difference between the two groups may be described using the concepts of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes in Europeanization.

In the case of 'top-down' processes, the institutional and policy norms/regulations spread from the community level to the national level and the EU has a direct effect on national politics, as the party intends to capitalize on accession using the (abstract and material) resources of the EU. Category 1, 2 and 3 pledges embody this top-down direction, whereas pledges about the parties' EU-agenda (category 4) imply a 'bottom-up' direction, in which national

actors attempt to influence the Community's decisions. Category 5 pledges cannot be inserted into the Europeanization framework: although the 'Europe' motive appears, they clearly concern domestic policies and Europe is only a reference point or standard desirable to reach. But we do not exclude these pledges from the analysis because they can alter the picture of the EU perception of party manifestos.

In the case of 'top-down' pledges, we assume the themes change within the period examined: *the proportion of 'EU values' and 'adaptation' pledges decreases, while the proportion of 'EU funds' pledges increases over time* (H2). We hypothesize that abstract European values were important mainly in the early phase of accession; the adaptation of regulations and policies was typical of the manifestos of the first two elections; as Hungary's membership became a reality, EU-related pledges talked more and more about using the resources provided by the Union.

After identifying the pledges, the next step was to analyse the content of the information they include. Following the pledge approach, the analysis of information content means to identify the specificity of the quasi-sentences, to separate pledges that refer to measurable governmental activity from those too vague to yield any corresponding executive or legislative action. For example, in the case of the pledge 'we will maintain everything that is good', one can identify both the 'future act' and the 'commitment to a policy output' elements. However, it is not clear what the government will do to carry out the action or reach the promised outcome and, most importantly, it is unclear when we will be able to say that the pledge has been fulfilled. Thus, rhetorical pledges are promises without precise information content. We have used a scale with three scores to measure the specificity⁷ of pledges: specific; semi-specific; and non-specific.

Our study assumes that there is a change in the specificity of EU-related pledges: *pledges became more specific between 1998 and 2006* (H3). We claim that with accession, parties were able and were required to make more detailed or more exact EU-related pledges. Obviously, this assumption shares some similarities with the H2 hypothesis: if we claim abstract values were important in the early period and the concrete usage of funds became important later, it follows that the specificity of pledges also changes. Nevertheless, this relationship is not necessarily linear; therefore we attempt to compare the directions of the changes as well.

3.3. Pledge Fulfilment

Having identified the EU-related pledges and evaluated their specificity, we may investigate how the parties fulfilled these pledges in the government term after the election. To do so, we use the categories of pledge research (Table 2). First, the fulfilment of non-specific pledges cannot be measured, as they are rhetorical promises with no exact information content. Second, there are pledges that are specific or semi-specific. Their fulfilment is amenable to testing, but the test cannot be conducted for practical reasons: either there is no data available to prove/disprove fulfilment, or the task is too complex to perform (e.g. one would have to carry out a complete analysis of the related policy field to decide whether the pledge has been fulfilled).⁸ Finally, in the case of semi-specific and specific pledges, where the test is applicable, the degree of fulfilment is decidable. As Table 2 shows, the pledge research project used a more sophisticated categorization, dividing testable pledges into several sub-groups and

introducing two ‘partly fulfilled’ categories⁹, but in this study we simplify fulfilment into only two categories (‘fulfilled’ and ‘not fulfilled’), to get more manageable and transparent results in the empirical phase.

Table 2: Pledge Research Fulfilment Categories

Testability	Fulfilment	
Testable	Fulfilled	Fulfilled
		Rather fulfilled
	Not fulfilled	Rather not fulfilled
		Not fulfilled
	Not applicable	No data
		Complex testability
Not testable	Non-specific	Rhetorical pledge

Source: Authors.

We argue that the key to evaluating pledge fulfilment is the party’s position in the government. Although the preliminary results of the pledge research indicate approximately one-third of opposition party pledges are also fulfilled, parties in the government coalition after the election have a better chance to influence the policymaking processes. We assume that *more pledges were fulfilled by parties in government than by parties in opposition* (H4). In the institutional framework of parliamentary government, legislation is controlled by the executive, from which it follows that with rare exceptions, no compromise exists to break cleavages between the government and the opposition. Besides, mandate theory prescribes that elections are about a party’s own manifesto, and the expectation that it will be fulfilled by the government. We also expect to find differences between the governing parties. Every government since the post-communist transition has been a coalition government, with one party as clear leader. Presumably, the leading party in the coalition is more capable of enforcing its will than its coalition partner(s). But the relationship between the position in the government and pledge fulfilment is not clear enough to build a hypothesis, as smaller parties may also successfully fulfil pledges if they occupy a pivotal position in the coalition.¹⁰

4. Results

4.1. Number of Pledges

In Hungary, the characteristics and length of party manifestos vary widely. In some cases, they focus on the party’s past results (mostly compared to statements in texts – e.g., the 1998 MSZP manifesto), while in other cases they contain policy recommendations for the future, either brief or detailed (e.g., the 2002 MSZP program). As Table 3 shows, these factors add to the total number of pledges, given as the second number for each item (for example, Fidesz made 462 pledges in 1998, of which 21 were EU-related). Looking at the statistics, any trends are barely identifiable. The two extremes are the MDF (with one of the longest, most detailed

programs in the history of post-communist Hungary) and the FKgP (whose manifesto contained only a few pledges and numerous descriptions of the state of the country). While the pledge numbers vary over time, they are more or less equal for identical election years. This also means no significant difference is found for the number of pledges from governing versus opposition parties.¹¹

Table 3: Number and Percentage of EU Related Pledges in Party Manifestos

	Fidesz	MSZP	SZDSZ	MDF	FKgP	SUM
1998	21/462 (4.5%)	24/445 (5.4%)	–	214/2234 (9.6%)	17/339 (5.0%)	276/3480 (7.9%)
2002	15/262 (5.7%)	9/130 (6.9%)	1/168 (0.6%)	–	–	25/560 (4.5%)
2006	78/973 (8.0%)	57/917 (6.2%)	77/1098 (7.0%)	–	–	212/2988 (7.1%)
SUM	114/1697 (6.7%)	90/1492 (6.0%)	78/1266 (6.2%)	214/2234 (9.6%)	17/339 (5.0%)	513/7028 (7.3%)

Source: Calculation based on the author's data.

In the ten cases selected, we identified 513 EU related pledges. While their number varies widely depending upon the party and the election year, the proportion of EU related pledges is between 5.0 and 9.0 percent in most cases.¹² Having similar proportions implies that the 'EU' topic is not exclusively owned by either the government or the opposition parties.

Under our first hypothesis (H1), we assumed the number of EU related pledges would grow with the extent of integration, but the data curve is parabolic: in 1998 and 2006 there are far more EU related pledges than in 2002, taking into account both actual numbers and proportions. This means the European Union did not gain in significance as an element of party manifestos after Hungary's EU accession.

4.2. EU Themes and Specificity

The classification of EU-related pledges shows numerous changes from election to election (Table 4). In the first two elections, most pledges concerned domestic policies, with Europe serving only as a point of reference. The significance of this category had declined by 2006. This suggests the parties had begun to believe that Hungary's status had considerably changed: it became a member of the European Community and drew closer to European standards and institutions. The 'own EU agenda' category indicates the opposite direction: once a member, the opportunity for Hungary to influence the operation of European institutions was emphasized more and more.

In the case of the three 'top-down' type categories (where the EU affects national policy), the most striking finding of the study is that pledges about European values barely exist. Even before accession, the European Union appeared mainly as either an institution whose regulations must be adopted or as a reference point for standards to be attained. In addition,

Table 4: EU Related Pledges by Themes

	Party	European values	Adaptation	EU funds	Own EU agenda	Europe as a reference point	SUM
1998	Fidesz	2 (9.5%)	5 (23.8%)	5 (23.8%)	1 (4.8%)	8 (38.1%)	21
	FKgP	0 (0.0%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (82.4%)	17
	MDF	7 (3.3%)	85 (39.7%)	13 (6.1%)	19 (8.9%)	90 (42.1%)	214
	MSZP	0 (0.0%)	4 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (20.8%)	15 (62.5%)	24
	<i>Sum (1998)</i>	<i>9 (3.3%)</i>	<i>96 (34.8%)</i>	<i>19 (6.9%)</i>	<i>25 (9.1%)</i>	<i>127 (46.0%)</i>	<i>276</i>
2002	MSZP	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (100.0%)	9
	SZDSZ	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1
	Fidesz	0 (0.0%)	5 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	15
	<i>Sum (2002)</i>	<i>0 (0.0%)</i>	<i>5 (20.0%)</i>	<i>4 (16.0%)</i>	<i>2 (8.0%)</i>	<i>14 (56.0%)</i>	<i>25</i>
2006	MSZP	1 (1.8%)	10 (17.5%)	24 (42.1%)	11 (19.3%)	11 (19.3%)	57
	SZDSZ	4 (5.2%)	19 (24.7%)	20 (26.0%)	25 (32.5%)	9 (11.7%)	77
	Fidesz	7 (9.0%)	5 (6.4%)	39 (50.0%)	15 (19.2%)	12 (15.4%)	78
	<i>Sum (2006)</i>	<i>12 (5.7%)</i>	<i>34 (16.0%)</i>	<i>83 (39.2%)</i>	<i>51 (24.1%)</i>	<i>32 (15.1%)</i>	<i>212</i>
SUM		<i>21 (4.1%)</i>	<i>135 (26.3%)</i>	<i>106 (20.7%)</i>	<i>78 (15.2%)</i>	<i>173 (33.7%)</i>	<i>513</i>

Source: Calculation based on own data.

the intention to use EU resources was present even in 1998 via the pre-accession instruments (e.g. the PHARE).

Our second hypothesis (H2) assumed that the importance of EU values and the adaptation to EU regulations/policies would decline over time, while the proportion of EU fund-related pledges would increase. The small number of 'EU values' pledges indicates the abstract values of Europe never played a major role in party manifestos. This could be explained by the fact that manifestos are simply collections of practical, exact policy recommendations, but this is not true in the case of the Hungarian programs, which often contain rhetorical pledges about abstract values like 'justice' and 'social peace'.

The observed lack of values in the manifestos requires explanation. As noted early in this paper, accession to the European Union was not a divisive issue in Hungary, at least up until the last election analysed here. Values associated with the EU or, on a more general conceptual level, with Europe, were shared by the relevant parties. We are inclined to think that opposing them would have prevented a party from winning the election, even as a junior coalition partner. Therefore, detailing the obvious in the manifestos would have been redundant. But this does not mean there was no debate over democracy in Hungary, only that it was not fought on the European level. It is worth noting that this changed after 2010, when the European question took the foreground. A more plausible explanation is that EU accession was more pragmatic in nature, and at least in the cycles analysed, manifestos stressed the institutional side of integration.

Nevertheless, with time a shift can be observed for 'adaptation' and 'EU funds' pledges. As we assumed, the importance of adaptation to EU policies and regulations declined (34.8%;

20%; 16%) after accession, while pledges about the use of EU resources began to play more prominently in manifestos after Hungary joined the Union (6.9%; 16%; 20.7%).

To understand the specificity results of EU related pledges correctly, in Table 5 we have also indicated the specificity of non-EU related promises. The data shows that the Hungarian pledges are basically non-specific. The only election campaign is in 2002, when the parties made more specific or semi-specific pledges than non-specific pledges.¹³ EU-related pledges seemingly follow a very similar pattern: in 1998, only every fifth pledge was somewhat specific, but more than half the pledges were non-specific even in succeeding elections. It is interesting that the proportion of non-specific pledges is higher amongst EU-related pledges in every election year. In summary, Hungarian manifesto pledges are usually non-specific rhetorical promises, and pledges regarding the European Union are even less specific.

Table 5: Specificity of Pledges

	Party	EU-related			Non-EU-related		
		Non-specific	Semi-specific	Specific	Non-specific	Semi-specific	Specific
1998	Fidesz	16 (76.2%)	3 (14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	311 (70.5%)	104 (23.6%)	26 (5.9%)
	FKgP	17 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	196 (60.9%)	81 (25.2%)	45 (14.0%)
	MDF	181 (84.6%)	28 (13.1%)	5 (2.3%)	1341 (66.4%)	558 (27.6%)	121 (6.0%)
	MSZP	19 (79.2%)	4 (16.7%)	1 (4.2%)	352 (83.6%)	64 (15.2%)	5 (1.2%)
	<i>Sum (1998)</i>	<i>233 (84.4%)</i>	<i>35 (12.7%)</i>	<i>8 (2.9%)</i>	<i>2200 (68.7%)</i>	<i>807 (25.2%)</i>	<i>197 (6.1%)</i>
2002	MSZP	9 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	45 (37.2%)	35 (28.9%)	41 (33.9%)
	SZDSZ	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	76 (45.5%)	50 (29.9%)	41 (24.6%)
	Fidesz	4 (26.7%)	6 (40.0%)	5 (33.3%)	44 (17.8%)	109 (44.1%)	94 (38.1%)
	<i>Sum (2002)</i>	<i>14 (56.0%)</i>	<i>6 (24.0%)</i>	<i>5 (20.0%)</i>	<i>165 (30.8%)</i>	<i>194 (36.3%)</i>	<i>176 (32.9%)</i>
2006	MSZP	35 (61.4%)	19 (33.3%)	3 (5.3%)	612 (71.2%)	238 (27.7%)	10 (1.2%)
	SZDSZ	62 (80.5%)	10 (13.0%)	5 (6.5%)	702 (68.8%)	232 (22.7%)	87 (8.5%)
	Fidesz	28 (35.9%)	39 (50.0%)	11 (14.1%)	430 (48.0%)	340 (38.0%)	125 (14.0%)
	<i>Sum (2006)</i>	<i>125 (59.0%)</i>	<i>68 (32.1%)</i>	<i>19 (9.0%)</i>	<i>1744 (62.8%)</i>	<i>810 (29.2%)</i>	<i>222 (8.0%)</i>
SUM		<i>372 (72.5%)</i>	<i>109 (21.2%)</i>	<i>32 (6.2%)</i>	<i>4109 (63.1%)</i>	<i>1811 (27.8%)</i>	<i>595 (9.1%)</i>

Source: Calculation based on author's data.

Concerning hypothesis H3, that pledges became more specific between 1998 and 2006, we found controversial results: the proportion of rhetorical pledges decreased between 1998 and 2002 but slightly increased between 2002 and 2006. In addition, in 2002, when only one-third of non-EU-related pledges were non-specific promises, this number was considerably higher in the case of EU-related pledges.

As noted above, there may be a connection between EU topics and the specificity of pledges (Table 6). In other words, we can safely assume that pledges about EU values tend to be more non-specific, while promises concerning the adaptation of regulations and policies and the use of EU resources tend to be more specific.

As Table 6 indicates, 1998 was an extreme case, in which all three top-down-type EU related pledges were mostly non-specific (84–89%). Although in succeeding elections, ‘adaptation’ and ‘EU funds’ pledges became more concrete, a considerable number remained non-specific. This means that even a seemingly precise topic like the use of EU funds may be formulated in a non-specific rhetorical form. To investigate this ‘anomaly’, we made an overview of these pledge types and found pledge specificity is usually compromised if the asset in the pledge is specific but its objective is unclear (e.g., ‘we will develop the infrastructure with the help of the regional operational programs’ – one cannot define exactly the elements included in the concept of ‘infrastructure’). Although, the EU-related parts of these pledges are more or less specific, when the implementation methodology is unclear or the objective poorly defined, pledges may veer into the non-specific.

Table 6: Specificity and EU Themes

	EU theme	Non-specific	Semi-specific	Specific
1998	European values	8 (88.9%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)
	Adaptation	81 (84.4%)	10 (10.4%)	5 (5.2%)
	EU funds	16 (84.2%)	1 (5.3%)	2 (10.5%)
2002	European values	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	Adaptation	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)	1 (20.0%)
	EU funds	1 (25.0%)	2 (50.0%)	1 (25.0%)
2006	European values	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)
	Adaptation	13 (38.2%)	10 (29.4%)	11 (32.4%)
	EU funds	33 (39.8%)	43 (51.8%)	7 (8.4%)

Source: Calculation based on own data.

4.3. Excursus: Bottom-Up and ‘Reference Point’ Pledges

Beyond pledges concerning adaptation to EU institutions and policies, access to EU-funds and common European values, manifestos contain promises that offer a different view of Europe. Pledges that belong to the former group are related to government actions or behaviour, which seems to imply a reactive relationship to the EU. Accession to the EU requires meeting a set of expectations and brings resources to aid in approximating EU standards. There are, however, other campaign promises independent of what the EU expects and offers. These are induced on the domestic level but still framed in relation to Europe or the European Union.

To make sense of these pledges, we employed two further variables to understand what role the concept of the EU plays. The first variable in this sub-group, called ‘Own EU-agenda’ concerns what the Hungarian government would do in relation to the EU as a foreign policy partner, or how the national government would alter the political mechanisms of the EU, and which reforms it would foster. The second, called ‘Europe as a reference point’, describes those pledges related to domestic policies but whose aim is to reach a level or quality equal to European models.

It is important to note that in political discourse, the difference between the concepts of Europe and the European Union is highly blurred. The two have often been used interchangeably, especially as relates to the pledges we analyse in this section. This vagueness is not necessarily accidental. The aim of approximation here is not to fit the formal institutions of the European Union, nor to adhere to a set of 'European values'. It concerns a general promise to return to Europe and to close the gap between Hungary and Europe, with the 'gap' primarily referring to differences in terms of welfare, wages and social services. In relation to any policy area, mentioning Europe suggests improving conditions, the general promise of the transition.

Some of the pledges in question seem rhetorical; however, they do not map precisely onto the set of values connected to either integration or a common European idea. Although some are clear-cut policy-related pledges, and often mention Europe or the EU, a good number might be understood independently of the accession process or have nothing in common with the formal conditions of membership. These pledges, either value- or policy-oriented, may be considered only pseudo-EU-related, but it would be a mistake to neglect them, as they still inform voters about the respective parties' intentions.¹⁴

As early as 1998, when the accession date was still too distant to become a serious discussion topic, the manifesto of a junior coalition partner in the government discussed the importance of approximation, not because of EU membership requirements, but rather because of the capacity to act once Hungary became an EU Member State. In the same campaign, the socialist party's manifesto contained several pledges on the development of agriculture, implying the necessity of being able to compete with the 'old' member states. Other pledges differentiated between EU membership as an aim of domestic policy processes and EU membership as a means to improve certain policy areas. The difference between pledges expressly on adaptation and those that only mention the EU as a point of reference is obvious in the case of taxation, where common policies give more freedom to national governments. Promising tax reductions by referring to the EU average obviously has little to do with the formal aspects of accession. It is rather about setting a point of reference that legitimizes the pledge through comparison. The same is true of pledges to do with a target number of university students.

Moving to the 'own EU agenda' type of promise, the number of pledges decreases. Not surprisingly, between 1998 and 2006 Hungarian parties barely made an effort to convince voters of the best strategy for acting successfully within the EU, or of the necessary reform of its institutions. However, sometimes EU capacities came under discussion to assure voters that accession would mean advantages in the long-run.

4.4. Pledge Fulfilment

Because of the specificity of EU related pledges, most of them cannot be tested for fulfilment — they are rhetorical promises lacking adequate identifiable content. Although there are a few minor cases where more than two-thirds of the pledges can be tested, on average 72% of pledges are rhetorical promises (Table 7.). In addition, there are a few pledges that are specific enough to test, but conducting the test comes up against practical difficulties (no data is accessible, or the task would be too complex). If we exclude these categories, only 23.4% of the pledges remain to be tested for fulfilment. This roughly matches the preliminary preliminary pledge research results, which found only about one-third of pledges could be successfully tested.

Table 7: Fulfilment of EU Related Pledges

	Party		Fulfilled	Not fulfilled	Not applicable	Non-specific	SUM
1998	Governing party	Fidesz	4 (19.0%)	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (76.2%)	21
	Coalition partner 1	FKgP	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	17 (100.0%)	17
	Coalition partner 2	MDF	15 (7.0%)	10 (4.7%)	8 (3.7%)	181 (84.6%)	214
	Opposition party	MSZP	3 (12.5%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	19 (79.2%)	24
	<i>Sum (1998)</i>			22 (8.0%)	13 (4.7%)	8 (2.9%)	233 (84.4%)
2002	Governing party	MSZP	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (100.0%)	9
	Coalition partner 1	SZDSZ	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	1
	Opposition party	Fidesz	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	4 (26.7%)	15
	<i>Sum (2002)</i>			5 (20.0%)	5 (20.0%)	1 (4.0%)	14 (56.0%)
2006	Governing party	MSZP	8 (14.0%)	13 (22.8%)	1 (1.8%)	35 (61.4%)	57
	Coalition partner 1	SZDSZ	6 (7.8%)	9 (11.7%)	0 (0.0%)	62 (80.5%)	77
	Opposition party	Fidesz	18 (23.1%)	21 (26.9%)	11 (14.1%)	28 (35.9%)	78
	<i>Sum (2006)</i>			32 (15.1%)	43 (20.3%)	12 (5.7%)	125 (59.0%)
SUM			59 (11.5%)	61 (11.9%)	21 (4.1%)	372 (72.5%)	513

Source: Calculation based on own data.

At this point, our conclusion might be that the parties rarely fulfil any promise, but this would be inaccurate. We can only justifiably argue that the parties rarely make clear promises. Pledges are mostly rhetorical declarations with little or no information content or whose fulfilment is difficult to verify. Using the pledge-approach framework (which has a relatively narrow definition for testable pledges), only a minority of pledges may be analysed effectively.

Nevertheless, we can test and hypothesis H4, that parties in government fulfilled more pledges than parties in opposition by narrowing the analysis to this minor group of effectively testable EU-related pledges (Table 8). This makes it possible to compare the parties' performance – with the exception of the 2002 election. In 2002, neither of the two coalition partners whose pledge fulfilment was effectively measurable made pledges related to the European Union in their manifestos. This means the hypothesis may be tested only for the 1998–2002 and 2006–2010 terms.

Despite the small number of pledges, the 1998 term verifies our hypothesis, as the leading coalition party was able to fulfil most of its EU related pledges, while its junior coalition partner, MDF, had the same fulfilment rate as did opposition party MSZP. We overviewed the pledges made for this term and found that there was only slight overlap between the parties' pledges: Fidesz made promises about agriculture and the environment, MDF focused mainly on transport, foreign trade and education, and MSZP was interested in general financial issues. By contrast, results for 2006 were contradictory with regard to our hypothesis, as the pledges of the main opposition party, Fidesz, were fulfilled in larger proportion than were the promises of either party in government. Obviously this does not mean Fidesz was capable of accomplishing what it wished in the parliament; instead its success resulted from the considerable overlap between the parties' pledges: MSZP and Fidesz shared the topics of railway

Table 8: Pledge Fulfilment (effectively testable pledges)

	Party		Fulfilled	Not fulfilled	Fulfilled (%)	Not fulfilled (%)	SUM
1998	Governing party	Fidesz	4	1	80.0%	20.0%	5
	Coalition partner 1	FKgP	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0
	Coalition partner 2	MDF	15	10	60.0%	40.0%	25
	Opposition party	MSZP	3	2	60.0%	40.0%	5
	<i>Sum (1998)</i>			22	13	62.9%	37.1%
2002	Governing party	MSZP	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0
	Coalition partner 1	SZDSZ	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0
	Opposition party	Fidesz	5	5	50.0%	50.0%	10
	<i>Sum (2002)</i>			5	5	50.0%	50.0%
2006	Governing party	MSZP	8	13	38.1%	61.9%	21
	Coalition partner 1	SZDSZ	6	9	40.0%	60.0%	15
	Opposition party	Fidesz	18	21	46.2%	53.8%	39
	<i>Sum (2006)</i>			32	43	42.7%	57.3%
SUM			59	61	49.2%	50.8%	120

Source: Calculation based on author's data.

improvement (using EU funds) and rural development, while both Fidesz and SZDSZ made promises concerning education.

5. Conclusion

After the post-communist transition, Hungary's accession to the European Union was almost a historical necessity. Voters and relevant parties alike supported the idea of Hungary becoming an EU member state. But even if hardly open to dispute, the decision required the approval of the voters. The question is how the relevant parties met that requirement in their election manifestos. According to the mandate view of representative government, election manifestos are crucial because they contain indispensable information for voters to grant governments the authorization to undertake actions save the file.

In this study, we have attempted to explore the significance of Hungarian election manifestos from the perspective of EU accession. Our findings show manifestos, especially pledges contained in them that related to the EU, were not detailed enough to inform voters of the parties' intentions. Campaign pledges between 1998 and 2006 lacked the specificity to reveal details of the parties' plans regarding accession. Moreover, because of the small number of specific pledges, measuring the extent to which governments fulfilled these pledges gives little insight into the nature of accession as a topic.

On the one hand, our findings on the remarkable number of rhetorical pledges might contribute to criticism of the mandate approach of representative government¹⁵; on the other hand, they suggest a significant change in the Hungarian political context.

As noted, Hungary's accession to the European Union as a strategic decision was not politically divisive after the transition. Accordingly, political conflicts avoided the membership question, and no party was interested in using it to construct a cleavage. Although the European Union, adapting to its institutions, and using its financial resources were all mentioned in the manifestos, the set of political values associated with Europe was lacking in the documents analysed here. We assume that accession as an issue formed an island of peace, at least in the 1998–2006 campaigns, even if tactical differences did emerge among the parties regarding certain policy areas. These remained blurred in the eyes of the voters.

The political context, however, changed after 2006. With the breakthrough of *Jobbik*, an anti-system party, and especially the emergence of a sovereignty discourse after the victory of Fidesz in 2010 and 2014, the topic of membership came to the fore. Whether this was the result of the daily conflicts between Hungary as a Member State and Brussels, the post-2008 crisis, or was merely due to domestic factors, and whether these things are reflected in the later manifestos as well, is a question that is beyond the scope of this study.

Notes:

1. On looking closer, however, tactical differences emerged among the parties, especially concerning agriculture and Hungarian minorities residing in neighboring countries (Vidra 2006).
2. The result and the consequences of this lack of dispute were foreshadowed in 1997, when less than half of voters voted in the NATO referendum, but 85.33% voted in favor of Hungarian accession. In both cases, a positive outcome and clear decision was possible simply due to a modification of the constitutional regulations that lowered the validity threshold.
3. 'Election Pledges and Public Policy in Hungary, 1990–2014' (hereafter: 'Pledge Research') OTKA [Hungarian Scientific Research Fund] K–101401.
4. About the detailed research method for the selection and the nature of the media pledges, see Soós, Papp and Gyulai (2013).
5. This method of identification (i.e. using the pledge approach over the saliency-approach) excludes statements from the research. On the one hand, this means that we are unable to examine descriptive elements, which only serve to emphasize the importance of a given EU-related issue. On the other hand, this makes it possible to analyze the fulfillment of pledges.
6. In a few pledges, the parties use the phrases 'Europe' or 'Western Europe'. In these cases, we examined the meaning of the phrases based on their context and considered if they could be understood as synonyms for the EU.
7. Specificity was determined by coding the pledges according to a pattern consisting of (1) their numerical information, (2) the intent to establish or abolish an institution, measure or policy program, (3) a reference to any policy content if the previous was not identifiable, (4) the detailed formulation of the pledge and (5) the temporal responsibility assumed by the promisor. A pledge, then, is non-specific if it does not contain any numerical references or at least the direction of the promised change (e.g., 'we will change the system of taxation' or 'we will reduce personal income tax' or 'we will reduce personal income tax by 10%'), or it does not refer to taking legislative action, or does not mention any policy area, or it refers to fulfillment beyond the end of the term, that is, beyond the end of the government mandate.
8. Examples: (1) no data: 'every ambulance will reach its destination within 15 minutes of being called' (we cannot gather data on this pledge using the resources available); (2) complex testability: 'the laws on the environment will be harmonized with EU regulations' (we would have to analyze every related law and its relation to EU regulations, then determine the degree of harmonization).

9. As Table 2 indicates, with the application of these categories, the pledges may be placed on scales with either two potential scores (fulfilled; not fulfilled), three scores (fulfilled; partially fulfilled; not fulfilled) or four scores (fulfilled; somewhat fulfilled; somewhat unfulfilled; not fulfilled) – depending on the purpose of the research.
10. Moreover, there may be an overlap between the pledges of the parties – this problem is not researched in this phase of the pledge research.
11. The governing parties at the time of the electoral campaigns: MSZP in 1998; Fidesz in 2002; MSZP and SZDSZ in 2006.
12. Table 3 shows one striking bit of data: the liberal SZDSZ in 2002 had only one EU-related pledge.
13. This feature of the campaign in 2002 is contradictory, as the struggle between Fidesz and MSZP in that year was especially fierce. The campaign in the media and on the streets was more about symbolic conflicts, creating enemies and political hatred, rather than policy-related pledges.
14. E.g., ‘European norms in cultural policies; ‘We will represent our own national interests in the European Union’; ‘Comprehensive deregulation in Europe’.
15. According to a different evaluation of the rhetorical pledges, they may also be considered important in the mandate view of representation since they also bear crucial information that helps voters make decisions even if their fulfillment cannot be measured based on a set of objective criteria (Szűcs, Gyulai 2013).

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