
Dr. Gille addressed Hungarian national identity and the complexity of Hungary’s EU relationship. EU accession promised Hungary a stronger democracy, currency, and place in world politics. Current statistics, however, point to radically different outcomes. Since Hungary’s accession, the poverty rate has hit astronomical highs, followed by a falling GDP per capita ranking, and the identification of Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán as head of the second most corrupt political regime in the world, according to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project.

FIDESZ, the Hungarian conservative party, has consistently been the most popular political party in Hungary since 2010, which raises the question of whether the European outcome promised is still what the people of Hungary desire. Dr. Gille attributes the party’s continued popularity to common feelings in Hungary that political influence within the EU is rigged, creating a disenchantment with European visions, ideals, and the EU itself. She notes that the three scandals Hungary has faced during its European Union membership have impacted these national attitudes.

In 2004, paprika produced in Hungary was found to contain a carcinogenic mycotoxin due to imported peppers from Brazil and Spain. Paprika is prominently featured in Hungarian cuisine and considered a Hungaricum (encapsulation of Hungarian culture). Hungary had heavily modified their regulations to fit EU standards, however, Spain’s EU membership meant that the Spanish peppers used in Hungarian produced paprika no longer required testing. Hungarian paprika imports were suspended within the EU and Hungarian paprika’s image was quickly destroyed. Hungary’s requests that the European Food Safety Authority test aflatoxin levels on imported peppers from Spain were denied.

The second scandal involves foie gras, which Hungarians historically enjoy in celebration of the day of Saint Marton (November 11th). This specialty is produced after fattening geese by means of force-feeding (gavage). In 2008, an Austrian organization named Four Paws blacklisted the Hungarian foie gras industry, claiming that the delicacy is produced inhumanely and that birds fattened through force-feeding are diseased. Quickly after the boycott Austrian and German supermarkets removed Hungarian foie gras products, resulting in a loss of almost 19 million dollars. Lawsuits later ensued, claiming that the organization Four Paws was actually funded by the German and Austrian foie gras competitors wishing to remove Hungary from the market.

In 2010, Hungary was devastated by the Red Mud Disaster. Red Mud is a highly caustic byproduct of aluminum production. On October 4th, a reservoir holding the derivative broke, flooding three villages and killing ten people. In complying with EU legislation, Hungary had removed red mud from its list of hazardous waste.
This led to less care being taken when disposing of the dangerous byproduct.

These cases demonstrate Hungary’s national attitude that the EU has failed in delivering promises of safer food, environmental responsibility, and currency growth. Dr. Gille concluded her lecture by offering a solution of more transparent policy-making in the EU and adding higher levels of accountability, therefore alleviating Hungary’s suspicion and mistrust of the system. Her theoretical approach to these case studies are insightful and inspiring to other scholars delving into matters of globalization, identity, and materiality.

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