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Kovács, János Mátyás & Trencsényi, Balázs (eds), *Brave New Hungary. Mapping the 'System of National Cooperation'*. Lanham, MD & London: Lexington Books, 2020, ix + 450pp., £85.00/\$130.00 h/b.

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This collection, edited by experts on the histories of economic, political and cultural thought brings together an impressive range of specialists on Hungary accompanied by insights on two neighbouring jurisdictions and the European Union in order to provide a holistic picture of the transformation of the Hungarian political regime under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Rather than focusing narrowly on selected changes, it shows the major developments as pieces in a larger mosaic. For this purpose, unusually in the abundant contemporary literature on Hungarian (non)democracy, the book takes the 'System of National Cooperation' (SNC) as its key yardstick. The SNC, encompassing the essential elements of the Hungarian *Sonderweg*, marked the starting point of a range of post-2010 constitutional and policy changes, supported by the parliamentary majority.

The volume is divided into three parts, each including six chapters that bring a range of disciplinary perspectives as well as case studies of specific policy areas and personalities. The historical perspective retains a prominent position throughout each of the parts and especially in a valuable concluding chapter by the editors that takes stock of the Hungarian political regime. Although not unanimously endorsed by all contributions (see Stephen Holmes' chapter), the book argues that the Hungarian regime is a unique experiment, enabled by a coincidence of historical developments alongside the rise of new forms of political communication. These practices favor the relativisation of truth and facts, creating a regime of 'many faces' that conceals its autocratic ambitions. They are dissected particularly in the discussion surrounding Bálint Magyar's work on Orbán and his party transforming Hungary

into a ‘mafia state’ (Chapters 13–15), in which they are employed in the name of retaining power for as long as possible, no matter the long-term costs for Hungarian democracy.

The volume’s first part starts with a survey of the changes introduced in the 2011 Hungarian Fundamental Law. According to Renáta Uitz, the adoption of the Fundamental Law should be seen in light of the ‘revolutionary terminology in the vocabulary of National Cooperation’ because its ‘labels and metaphors’ (p. 22) serve as a lens to understand the constitutional changes. The section continues with chapters discussing various domains where the government has ‘totalised’ its own interpretations at the expense of a genuine public debate: the interpretation of Hungary’s role and responsibility in the 20th-century atrocities (Ferenc Laczó); the framing of civil society as enemy of the regime and construction of government-supported NGO sector (Virág Molnár); the selective inclusion of Hungarians living abroad in electoral politics (Gábor Egry); the saga of modifications in church law which increasingly support the Catholic Church while still retaining the formal appearance of church-state separation (Gábor Halmai); and the ‘unorthodox’ economic policy of Fidesz, explained through a discussion of György Matolcsy, the regime’s ‘economic visionary’ (János Mátyás Kovács).

The second part describes Orbán’s transformation of several policy areas and exposes the internal contradictions brought about by these changes, in particular the tension between social welfare and liberalisation, termed ‘selective austerity’ (János Köllő, Attila Melegh, Péter Mihályi, Dorottya Szikra; see also pp. 410–414 of the conclusion). The discussion is followed by mapping of the ‘illiberal metamorphosis’ of the Hungarian media environment, currently an essential tool in maintaining public support for the government (Miklós Haraszti). The inclusion of the case of the Central European University as narrated by the CEU’s former Pro-Rector for Hungarian Affairs (Zsolt Enyedi), is helpful, as, despite the extensive media coverage, academic studies on various dimensions of the case remain rather scarce to date.

The first three chapters of the third part present Bálint Magyar’s theory and offer two erudite reflections by Stephen Holmes and Balázs Váradi. They are followed by three accounts of developments beyond Hungary: the role of the EU (Jan-Werner Müller), and the political transformations in Poland (Radosław Markowski) and Romania (Silvia Marton). The case studies

of two neighbouring countries should not create the impression that these countries are the only ones in need of study to understand whether a ‘regional backsliding’ is under way. They may be read as an addition to the array of Hungary-focused chapters that prompt the reader to think in comparative terms.

Given the range of perspectives, the choice of the editors not to prescribe the use of a particular concept in capturing Hungary’s political regime (p. 420) appears warranted. Even without such a prescription, the contributions converge on demonstrating how Hungary’s regime has turned away from constitutional foundations and no longer possesses most of the key attributes of democracy as presented in mainstream conceptualisations. The volume was finalised in 2019 and thus could not address the political and societal implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we have witnessed the consolidation of the regime through a range of extensive emergency measures further strengthening the authority of the executive. Such consolidation corresponds to one of the scenarios of the regime’s development presented by the editors in the concluding chapter (p. 418). While the state of emergency introduced in Hungary before COVID-19 in relation to migration, resulting in permanent emergency governance, could have benefitted from more attention, the concluding outlook underscores the capacity of the book to inform our understanding of Hungarian regime change post-2019.

As can be expected in a volume devoted to an elite vision of transformation of the society, less emphasis is placed on the social origins of the regime and the public perceptions that have facilitated its emergence. The changes in the educational system beyond the university sector, the regulation of political parties and the shifts in foreign policy attitudes could form separate chapters fitting into the book. Still, the breadth of the issues covered in a single volume is remarkable and will ensure that students find the book an excellent source of information and expert insights on a wide range of questions pertaining to Hungary’s political, legal and social system, including the survey of existing perspectives on the causes and implications of Hungarian regime change.