

THE CASE OF KATALIN CSEH: THE POWER OF MEDIOCRITY

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Katalin Cseh is upset. This Hungarian Member of the European Parliament is in a permanent state of political frustration and anger. And it's understandable. Last year, despite a hectic and expensive electoral campaign throughout the country, her party, Momentum, secured ten seats in the Hungarian Parliament, roughly 5% of the chamber. One of those ten was elected outside Budapest which, for a party created for (and by) the urban Brahmin Left, is quite a feat. Currently, they stagnate at roughly 5% of the polls, which is again good news given that in the primary elections of the left coalition, it was rather 3% of their own voters.

So please bear with her if, from time to time (actually, rather too often), she releases her frustration, spreading lies and parroting mantras about her country and calling on EU action for any problem her friends cannot solve back in Budapest. Actually, free riding on Orbán's notoriety is a good way to draw attention in Strasbourg and build ephemeral careers as some Green MEPs have shown for a decade already.

In a recent op-ed, Cseh made the effort of recycling tweets, slogans, and personal onslaughts to prove her points. What points? That disagreeing with her *prêt-à-penser* mantras is tantamount to social deviance and that the political debate can be perfectly limited to calumnies, smears, and—at best—approximations. We knew that not abiding to the official dogmas turns one into a serial “phobic;” now, we just discovered, thanks to Cseh, that real attachment to intellectual diversity instantly transforms you into Putin's best friend.

That is why Cseh chose this time to issue her woke fatwa against the Mathias Corvinus Collegium and its freshly opened branch in Brussels, a think tank aiming at bringing a pinch of intellectual diversity in an otherwise very homogenous Brussels bubble. How dare

they?! Thus, by art of cancel culture magic, prestigious professors like Frank Furedi and Wernert Patzelt with established careers, dozens of books and hundreds of publications behind them, become Russian agents and, apparently, antisemitic too. All “piloted” from Budapest by a homophobic government who dares to question the “gender theory” that castrates and mutilates vulnerable teenagers based on caricatural gender stereotypes.

To start with, Cseh seems to forget that, apart from trivialising antisemitism (which is soaring in Western Europe at the shade of both the extreme-left and radical Islam) she campaigned less than a year ago, hand in hand, with her notoriously antisemitic buddies of Jobbik. With a bright smile. Moreover, Cseh’s grotesque caricatures are indicative of at least two underlying commitments.

First, they reveal the nervousness of the guardians of the temple when their cultural hegemony is challenged and confronted by other viewpoints. Hence, Cseh’s horror at an institution like the MCC daring to think outside the box. It is telling that in times of triumphant cancel culture in Western universities (a cultural cancer turning sanctuaries of knowledge into indoctrination centres), Cseh wastes no time in trying to muzzle a “dissident” voice through gross smears and cheap lies. No wonder Frank Furedi describes initiatives to decolonise curricula as the work of a “cultural Taliban.”

Second, her behaviour is also the paradigmatic example of the mediocrity of “clickbait politicians.” Overrepresented in the European Parliament, they seem to forget that statesmanship is so much more than likes and retweets. Untalented, allergic to complexity and nuance, good at barking but unable to manage and lead, those buzz politicians proudly boast their mediocrity to the satisfaction of their own choir. But not beyond, and that is precisely Momentum’s dire problem.

Unable to convince voters beyond *bourgeois-bohème* circles in Budapest, Momentum is inaudible in the rest of the country and patently frustrated about it. So, let’s be lenient and indulge their bitterness. After all, it must be difficult to bear with this and be confronted, election after election, with one’s own mediocrity. Their lack of talent is so evident, that the only solution they’ve found is to recurrently call on the “EU” for help and

“europeanise” every lost national battle. With some success, I admit.

Yet, to be fair, Cseh and her peers excel in one field: cozying up with interest groups and active minorities and conflating them with a large majority of citizens. At national level, it does not take you far, but in Brussels and Strasbourg, this is how politics is made. A rough 5% accounts for more in a bubble where political diversity is conspicuous by its absence. And in that perfect echo chamber of globalised elites, Cseh’s smears and lies do indeed resound and reverberate. That is why, for example, in an unseen exercise of cynicism, the EU excluded all Hungarian students from the Erasmus flagship programme in one go, on spurious grounds.

Criticising a government is fair—that’s the opposition’s job. But I doubt embarking on a permanent campaign against the core interests of their own country will help Momentum break its glass ceiling and bring it to an historical result of roughly 6-7% in the next elections. It may well be half that much, which is, roughly, the score of political mediocrity.