On March 15th 2012, the day of a Hungarian national holiday commemorating the beginning of the Spring of Nations, supporters of the ruling party Fidesz and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán organised a march in Budapest. The event would most probably have gone unnoticed in the Polish media, if not for the "Great Departure" [Polish “Wielki Wyjazd”] to the Hungarian capital with a number of Polish participants who were called upon by members of local clubs that had formed around the right-wing newspaper “Gazeta Polska”.

The main aim of the event was to display support for Hungarians in general and Viktor Orbán in particular. Participants marched from the National Museum - where they had been welcomed upon arrival by István Tarlós, the Mayor of Budapest, and Tomasz Sakiewicz, the executive editor of “Gazeta Polska” - to Kossuth Square, where an official ceremony was held, featuring a speech by Viktor Orbán. Participants carried Polish and Hungarian flags and banners with bilingual inscriptions such as: "Orbán and Kaczyński – lead to Warsaw!" "God bless Hungarians" and "Solidarity". At the same time, members of "Gazeta Polska" clubs in Poland staged rallies in Kraków, Szczecin, and other Polish cities.

The "Great Departure" was not the first manifestation of right-wing activists’ support for Viktor Orbán’s policies. The most controversial statement came from Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the Polish Law and Justice party on October 9th 2011 after preliminary results showed that his own party had secured only 29.89% of the vote. Kaczyński said: "I am deeply convinced that the day of our success will come and we will have Budapest in Warsaw." Kaczyński appealed to the fact that the Hungarian ruling party, Fidesz, regained power after eight years in the opposition.

What could be mechanisms of Polish right-wing support for the current Hungarian leadership? Evidently, they appear to consist of two factors. The first one being a deeply
rooted cultural pattern of Polish-Hungarian friendship, whose proponents like to emphasise their common history, dating back to the times of the Jagiellonian dynasty and culminating in 1956 when Poles strongly supported the Hungarian Revolution against the communist regime. This bond can be summarized with the widely known 18th century phrase: “Lengyel, magyar - két jó barát, együtt harcol, s issza borát” (“Pole and Hungarian cousins be, good in arms and good for party”).

Such sympathies are also discernible from data obtained with a survey which has been conducted annually since 1975 under the auspices of the Center for Public Opinion Research (OBOP; Polish: Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej) up until 1993, and by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS; Polish: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej) ever since (See: Figure 1). For this survey, a representative sample of Poles is asked to report their attitudes towards other nationals. The exact number of targeted nations differs depending on the year of study and usually ranges between single digits to a few dozen. Attitudes towards Hungarians fluctuate around 50%, meaning that roughly half of all respondents declare their feelings to be positive or rather positive, which ranks them in 7th place among the most popular nations (after Italy, Spain, the United States, France, Britain, and the Czech Republic).
The second factor, that very probably influences the strong pro-Orbán attitudes observable on the right side of the Polish political spectrum, entails a general agreement with policies propagated by the Hungarian Prime Minister and his party, which won the general elections in 2010 with 58.8% of the vote. For instance, Orbán has become a symbol of strengthening the sovereignty of his country against the European Union and Russia. In addition to that, his political agenda is presented as a model right-wing government with a special emphasis on Christian values. Besides, there is another source of support for Orbán that specifically relates to the situation in Poland. Constitutional changes passed in 2011, which were aimed at limiting both freedom of speech and judicial independence, happened to be fervently criticized by the liberal media in Poland, including “Gazeta Wyborcza” (GW, the biggest daily newspaper in Poland). In December 2010, the executive editor of GW, Adam
Michnik, published an article with the title To Hungarian friends, in which he accuses Orbán of curtailing media freedoms. In January 2011, Michnik co-signed a letter addressed to European Union institutions together with Václav Havel and Árpád Göncz in which they lament the “dismantlement of the democratic system” undertaken by the Hungarian government. Moreover, he spoke at an anti-Orbán march in Budapest in March of the same year. These events, however, only fueled right-wing support for Orbán in the context of an alleged “Polish-Polish war”, which is a term used to describe on-going conflicts between conservatives and liberals within the Polish political scene. In contrast to the liberal media, right-wing discourse portrays Hungary as a model-country - hence the dream of Budapest in Warsaw.

Support for Viktor Orbán intensified in early 2012 after a debate about Hungary took place in the European Parliament on January 18th 2012. During this debate, a number of accusations were brought up against president Orbán. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, French MEP from the European Greens/European Free Alliance, said: “You are going in the direction of Chavez, Castro, and all the totalitarian regimes of this despicable world [sic] that we are fighting.” Hannes Swoboda, leader of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, said that if Hungary were to apply for EU accession, it could not be accepted at this point in time due to its unlawful constitution. Interestingly, Orbán was defended by Polish MEPs from the Europe of Freedom and Democracy group, who said that Viktor Orbán is so widely criticised because he “had the courage to impose taxes on international banks and corporations” and, above all, because he “had the courage to appeal to the traditional values of Christianity, beautiful national traditions, the traditional understanding of family, as opposed to left-wing political correctness”.

The grand narrative of Viktor Orbán as a distinguished right-wing leader and Hungary as a model Christian state struggling for sovereignty (against both the European Union and
Russia) is most readily shown in the film Long as I live: a story about Hungary by Ewa Stankiewicz and Jan Pospieszalski. It was published by “Gazeta Polska” on March 28th 2012. The film was shot during the “Great March” of support for Orbán in January 2012 and includes interviews with some of the participants of the march as well as with people representing a cross-section of society (among those interviewed were a philosopher, a journalist from “Magyar Nemzet”, an artist, an entrepreneur, a Jesuit monk, and the Hungarian Minister for Government Communication, Zoltán Kovács). Even Viktor Orbán himself was interviewed for the movie. At the very beginning of the film, the narrator claims that Hungary has now “a chance to slowly recover things that have been lost: their integrity, independent thinking, their work, their institutions”. The general line of argument, based on the opinions expressed by Hungarians and Poles living in Hungary who participated in the film, goes as follows: after the fall of communism, the former opposition supposedly reconciled with the communists and their combined forces proceeded to “seize parliament”. Orban is portrayed as the one who is capable of bringing back order and restoring the pride that Hungarians can derive from their own country and history. The European Union, on the other hand, is simply mistaken: there is no dictatorship, nor any threats to human rights in Hungary.

The second theme of the film comprises the invoked Polish-Hungarian friendship mentioned above. Hungarians express their thankfulness for the support they had received from Poles and stress their mutual affection. The Smolensk disaster - namely the plane crash in 2010 in which the Polish president and many state and military officials were killed - also surfaces in the film. The journalist from "Magyar Nemzet" implies that the plane crash was a consequence of relying on Russia and based this opinion on the suspicious circumstances surrounding the event, the resemblance to the Katyn massacre (in both cases members of the elite died), and claimed that it “[was] not the first time they [the Russians] are lying”. The
journalist proceeds to state that Viktor Orbán would not have let the Russians carry out the subsequent investigation as liberal Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk did. Throughout the film Tusk is compared with Ferenc Gyurcsány, former Prime Minister of Hungary, on two occasions. The first time in an interview by a Pole living in Hungary, who compares using police force against demonstrators in October 2006 in Hungary to the events of November 11th 2011 in Warsaw (police was employed against rioters in Warsaw during Independence Day clashes between right and left wing marches). The second time, in the context of the plane crash in Smolensk, after which Tusk shared an embrace with Vladimir Putin. This gesture was compared to a similar one made by Gyurcsány. The movie fails to mention that Donald Tusk expressed his support for Orbán in January 2012 and ends with a shot of a demonstration in support for the Hungarians that took place in Warsaw “in solidarity against the actions of Brussels”.

The film by Stankiewicz and Pospieszalski is supposed to show the “truth” about Hungary to Polish people. The truth being that international institutions and an anti-Christian conspiracy of liberal left-wing supporters of the European Union are solely to blame for Orbán’s negative international image. Needless to say, the movie does not make any attempt to present opinions from the opposition or ask questions about the Hungarian minority in Transylvania (though this topic does come up - one of the interviewees says that historically Transylvania is the heart of Hungary), etc. Not a word is said about the concerns expressed regarding the condition of democracy in Hungary by the European Parliament, by international human rights organizations, or by United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Orbán is portrayed as a hero for all of Central Europe, fighting the Russian-European two-headed dragon, the media, and the cartels. Polish viewers, of course, are perfectly familiar with these keywords – they are a vital part of Jaroslaw Kaczyński’s rhetoric. The
association, therefore, is simple - like Orbán for Hungary, Kaczyński can be a welcome savior for Poland.