Open letter to Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary

This open letter was an experiment on my side to use the power of <u>https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/</u> in a political topic, and also a way to let my frustration out in a hopefully moderated way.
It drew some attention to this blog, and its much more important topics, but how long it will last is yet unknown. I only got small amount of really rude responses, but it is very sad that neither "sides" understood the point. I don't criticize Mr. Orban as a person, and that my arguments are my personal view and can be questioned. I see urgent global problems that can't be solved with this political approach, and with the level of common thinking that actually creates our control systems.
For the translation I am most grateful to Ms Judit Friedrich, who volunteered making it. It is quite obvious that while I use English language as a working tool with moderate precision, she has style. Thank you very much, Judit!

Tuesday, 29 October 2013.

Dear Prime Minister,

My name is Loránd Kedves, I am 40 years old and I work as a software architect and programmer. It has recently come to my attention that, in a statement made on 11 October 2013, you reverted from talking about Dakotas to refer to my area of expertise – to my profession, I could say. From <u>a summary on the government homepage</u> I followed a link to the <u>following video</u>, which I watched several times. It was, I must admit, a peculiar experience.

Trying to interpret this official statement, and follow it intellectually, will be depressing in itself for a person attempting to think logically. You chose a few points of departure, which, I agree, are relevant and important (crisis, work, morals, faith), mixed in a few demagogical clichés (greedy banks, strong leader, ...), then, through a process of logical acrobatics, produced a heap of sentences which cannot really be called a text, since the points are not connected in any acceptable manner – and where there is a connection, the conclusions to be drawn from the actual words are catastrophic.

You practically train your audiences not to interpret what they hear, just to cheer or hiss. This, from the leader of a country, is irresponsible and unacceptable behaviour, in my view, and **I am rather hoping that you don't know what you are doing**. Here are a few examples of logical mistakes and half-drawn conclusions (for an explanation of logical fallacies, see the end of this letter):

- The EU is in crisis, but this was not its aim, so it is on the wrong path. This logical fallacy is called "false cause"; you ignore the role of changing external factors (which, however, you keep referring to when modifying your own policies);

- In order to solve the crisis, we need to turn around. This logical fallacy is called "black-or-white"; it is as if your protractor only displayed 0° and 180°, nothing in between (although in Hungary you keep implementing "adjustments" while not acknowledging the possibility of having made a mistake);

- You point out that it is the crisis that creates the need for a "strong leader" (which seems to be the image you have of yourself); moreover, according to an earlier statement you made, this is your "historic role"; once the crisis is over there is no need for you. Could you please tell us, **Mr. Prime Minister, is it in any way in your interest to solve any crisis?** What follows from your argumentation is that you yourself are the reason for the continued existence of struggle and crisis, without which you would again disappear from the political stage. This sounds rather discouraging for anyone wishing to live and work in peace...

- As opposed to "greedy banks" you prefer the "strong people" of state government. What guarantees can you offer, against the experiences of a thousand years as well as our definite current experiences, that the strong people you appoint will not also prove to be greedy, and will not be, unlike banks, impervious to law, since they write the law themselves?

The list could be continued, but this kind of analysis I only use as a tool, for it is not my primary area of expertise. It really should be carried out by those humanities professionals who have been declared not to produce value *[István Klinghammer, responsible leader for higher education in the Hungarian government, 13.06.2013]*. They could help differentiate correct conclusions from logical fallacies and false implicatures, or could prove the existence of similar fallacies in my argumentation. It would not be very convincing to ask FIDESZ spokesperson Gabriella Selmeczi to do it :-D

All that follows from all this for me is that, based on my work experience, it would be impossible to do constructive work on the same team with you, Mr. Prime Minister, since you are only able to think in terms of power structures. As a result, if you were a co-worker I would try to get as far away from you as possible. Unfortunately, you are the premier of my country, yet the motivations are the same. I repeat: this is not a question of personal sympathy or political conviction. Your behavior and your attitude, in view of my knowledge, analyses and life as well as work experience, are simply and incorrigibly destructive.

The reasons for writing this letter, however, are professional.

I have worked for twenty-five years to develop from the level of a beginning programmer to my current tasks of software architecture and systems analysis, tasks which I have carried out with considerable independence at several places of employment. **In theory, I should feel honoured that you have emphasized the importance of my professional role – but what you said is diametrically opposed to what I consider to be my job.** Although some of the activities of politicians and programmers show similarities, in my opinion you have presented my profession in an unfavourable light by using it as an example in explaining your attitude. I would like to summarize for you the differences that seem significant to me, so that a mistake of this magnitude should be possible to avoid at least in this area.

1: A software engineer (in this case, a mathematician creating computer programs) will not provide "new solutions", since, by definition, a software engineer will not be a professional in those areas for which the systems will be designed. A software engineer's forte is to consult professional experts of the area and prospective users of the system; to find out about their needs and the underlying stable logical systems; and then to actually build the system based on these preliminary enquiries. **If the personal vision of a software engineer even surfaces, it is a sign that something has been seriously messed up in the programming.**

2: The aim of a software engineer is precisely to create the stable system that you, Mr. President, have mentioned with so much derision, which will serve the user by its constancy and predictability without any further intervention. You would not be very impressed if you had to find the buttons on your mail client application in a different place every week, just because at that moment that particular place seemed to be most appropriate. **If a software engineer must continuously work on, and further adjust, the system once it has already been set up, then that system is fundamentally flawed.**

3: Every system has crises: new questions surface, new situations arise, tools deteriorate. **A good software engineer creates a system that will not reveal, even in a crisis situation, the person or personal effort of the programmer**; it will merely send an error message, containing the expected length of time necessary for correction and listing potential damage.

4: **A good software engineer is not indispensable, and will not fill an "historic role".** On the contrary, a good software engineer will do everything to make sure that the scope of knowledge and responsibility will be extended as much as possible, simply because the stability of the system and the service rendered to the user are too important to depend on a single person. **A good software engineer never makes decisions single-handedly; and if a feature requires much explanation, it will be changed, since the operation of a good system must feel natural and obvious**; the system merely provides a framework to facilitate work the users would be doing anyway.

All in all: The labours of a software engineer will not engender direct profit. Rather, they contribute to the achievements of the community by working as invisible servants, doing everything to enable the users of the system to do their work in as much comfort as possible. A software engineer will hand over all data in their raw form, without delay or interpretation, so that users can carry out their own analyses and will be able to make the best decisions within their own sphere of responsibility. Good software engineers are not "strong persons"; if they have done a good job, it is only their colleagues who know their names.

It would be difficult to doubt that you, Mr. Prime Minister, are the most effective politician currently in Hungary – but, as a direct consequence of this, you cannot understand any of what has been discussed here.

You, unlike myself, have spent your entire career assessing power relations, and fighting – and winning – power struggles. For you, the primary concern is the proportion of votes cast in your favour in the elections, rather than the long-term functionality of the entire system, or the provision of services for the people creating value within that system. For you, information technology does not mean services to be rendered efficiently to users but rather a chance for direct control and micro-management. For you, data transfer does not mean an impartial and honest transmission of information; you focus on the effect produced by your speech and on influencing the opinions of your listeners. For you, there is no honour in discovering a mistake you made, or in openly acknowledging it and drawing conclusions from it – mistakes are always committed by "others". You cannot believe it possible that an opinion different from yours might be more useful than yours. In a debate, you will look for a chance to vanquish your opponent rather than discover the truth. You cannot imagine giving up your current role in order for the system to work better; you cannot step into service promoting a different construction. **You are not living in the world of a software engineer.**

You ignore the fact that problems are solved not by software systems or the engineers writing programs for them; problems are solved by the users of the system. The creativity and efficiency of these users depend, among other factors, on the extent their hands are tied by the system; on the extent the system allows them to work independently, relying on their own expertise in their areas; on the extent the system serves them by providing raw, honest, clean data; and on the amount of time they have to waste adapting themselves to a system that keeps being changed.

The "reprogramming" you envision depicts an image of the worst possible kind of information technology; it does not "manage" but continually maintains crisis. I do accept that you need this ongoing crisis in order to fulfill your historic role, and, as long as you continue to direct this country, the Hungarian population will be forced to assist you in your endeavours. But please do not compare yourself to software engineers. To the best of my knowledge and on the basis of the experience throughout a 25-year career, programmers are not like this, and the systems we build are not like this either.

I repeat, it would be difficult to doubt that you, Mr. Prime Minister, are the most effective politician currently in Hungary – but our opinions obviously diverge concerning whether this feature will enable you to manage the forthcoming period, which, I agree, is likely to be rife with crises. Hence, when I say in conclusion that, despite all experiences to the contrary, I believe in the possibility of a workable Hungarian system, the existence of which has a significance above and beyond what we can conceive today, you and I are clearly thinking of different things.

May peace be with us!

Loránd Kedves

A clear and easy-to-use list of logical fallacies can be reached at the following link: https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com/

The fallacies mentioned above are described there as follows:

- **false cause**
- **black-or-white**

Within the responses I received to this letter, I had another list of fallacies, like:

- *__Ad hominem__: from the simplest "wish you would die" type, which is hard to forget, as I always use my own, rare name (unlike the Hungarian version of John Smith, I know of only one other person with it) and face in communication, to questioning my professional level without spending a minute on finding my CV or linkedIn profile (even if it's an ad hominem, still could be done with style...);*

- *__Genetic__: by saying I am a left-liberal - for some people this is quite close to "dangerous snot responsible for all the problems", not to mention that I don't consider myself being left-liberal and had my critics on that side too. (Yes, it's another fallacy, but it is not even true...);*

- *__Strawman__ and __appeal to emotion__: by saying that I personally despise Mr. Orban in this letter;*

- *__Appeal to authority__: "who are you to question HIS ways..."*

Yes, it is very hard to have a honest and objective debate on such topics, but I did not realize how far we are from it... and this is only politics, not real problems, like Fukushima or climate change.