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Hungary

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1. The Eastern Neighbours and Russia

Beyond pragmatism

Hungarian political parties, except some minor liberal ones from the so-called democratic opposition, pursue a strong pro-Russian foreign policy. The incumbent conservative government party, Fidesz has made a U-turn in its Russia relations since 2010. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a staunch critic of Russia for two decades, has turned into one of Moscow's most vocal defenders in the midst of its war in eastern Ukraine. Prime Minister Orbán concluded a huge nuclear deal with Rosatom in January 2014 and continues to pursue an intensive "gas diplomacy" with Moscow. The right-wing radical party Jobbik, Hungary's second-strongest party, has criticised the government's pro-European stance and favours even more engagement with Moscow - a historically unprecedented orientation for a radical right-wing party. Some scandals have also revealed financial support to Jobbik from Russia in the past. Major leftist opposition parties cautiously criticised Orbán's Russia and foreign policy on various grounds. Nonetheless, they also have a relatively pro-Russian legacy, since the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Ferenc Gyurcsány led cabinet engaged Moscow in different pipeline and political issues prior to 2010.

The Hungarian Prime Minister's turn towards Russia certainly has a strong economic justification. Energy is a major issue in this regard; the bilateral deals signal strong quid pro quo relations (roughly 70% of all gas and oil demand is covered by Russian imports). Prime Minister Orbán also criticised the sanctions as counter-productive and harmful for European economies. Budapest would like to normalise relations and minimise the negative consequences of the Ukraine crisis for bilateral relations. The government's Russia policy is more driven by utilitarian considerations, and maybe to some extent also by its EU-scepticism, coupled with ignorance of democratic deficits in Russia, rather than by ideology or "grand visions". Given the pro-Russian domestic party landscape, this policy line remains less risky and costly in terms of popular support, than any pro-Atlantic stance.

Public opinion polls show a more balanced picture, with Hungarians being traditionally more sceptical towards Moscow. Russia faces a setback if asked about general sympathies: Germany, United States, and even China have better rankings. Nevertheless, this is often not translated into party politics. For example even if almost half of the potential Jobbik voters would rather support the US than Russia in a "new Cold War", they remain ignorant to the right-wing radical party's strong pro-Russia line.

Link:

- "I am Eurasian" – The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right:
http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf

All quiet on the Hungarian front...

The events in Ukraine did not significantly change Hungary's relations with the Eastern Partnership countries. The main reason is that Hungary has never been a particularly enthusiastic or proactive supporter of the Eastern Partnership project, well demonstrated by the annual European Foreign Policy Scorecard surveys. Budapest concentrated its activities mostly on Moldova and on the partly Hungarian-populated Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. The latter receives more than 90 per cent of all Hungarian development aid funds spent in the Eastern neighbourhood.

In addition to this, since 2010 Hungary has been striving to establish and maintain good relations with Azerbaijan. This is mostly motivated by gas import interests, while concerns related to the democratic and human rights situation in Azerbaijan play no role at all. This is a structural element that is not going to be changed by the Ukraine crisis. The suspended diplomatic relations with Armenia are also not going to improve, because Yerevan would require Budapest to apologise for a pro-Azerbaijani move – in 2012 Hungary transferred a former Azerbaijani officer sentenced to lifelong imprisonment for murdering an Armenian soldier in Budapest to Baku, where he was immediately pardoned and promoted to national hero – which Hungary will not do in the near future.

Relations with Georgia and Belarus have been slowly, but steadily improving. The only minor change is that, in line with the government's strong foreign trade orientation, Budapest has started to push for improving the EU-Belarus relations, regardless of the domestic political situation in the country. While official Hungarian arguments stress the positive role played by Minsk in mediating the Ukraine ceasefire negotiations, in reality Budapest perceives Belarus both as an attractive export market and also as a possible partner in circumventing the Russian agricultural counter-sanctions.

All in all, the crisis did not change the Eastern Partnership-related prioritisation of Hungary, i.e. no new priorities were defined, or old priorities abandoned. Obviously, more attention is paid to Ukraine, but the overall strategic objectives and policies remained the same.

Links:

- European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2015: http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR125_SCORECARD_2015.pdf
- The Eastern Partnership is a bridge between Western and Eastern parts of Europe: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/the-eastern-partnership-is-a-bridge-between-western-and-eastern-parts-of-europe>

Limited expectations with little disappointment

Hungary had two main interests to achieve at the Riga Summit, making two proposals aimed at them. The first one was to immediately grant visa-free travel to Ukrainian citizens, motivated mainly by the above-described special interests about the Hungarians living in Ukraine. Following the summit, Prime Minister Orbán admitted that this did not succeed and criticised the EU for its delay.

The second Hungarian proposal was aimed at the further differentiation of the Eastern Partnership. However, the idea was not to prioritise the countries that made the most progress, i.e. Georgia and Moldova, but to further deepen energetic cooperation with Azerbaijan, a possible source of non-Russian gas supplies for Europe. As none of the two main Hungarian proposals went through, Orbán declared the summit only to be moderately successful.

The summit kept silent about the issue of membership perspective to Georgia, Ukraine, or Moldova, as well as about visa-free travel to the EU for the latter two, causing some disappointment in Budapest. Expectations in these respects are still vivid, regardless of the fact that in reality membership perspective has never been on the EU agenda and moreover, EaP countries were certainly fully aware of this. However, the expert community had a more balanced position and managed to point out the important results of the summit too, for example the benefits Ukraine actually got, such as a concrete deadline of introducing a visa free regime and the promise that the DCFTA will indeed come into force from 1st January 2016, thus there will be no further delay. Moreover, Kyiv also received a massive loan of 1.8 billion euro.

Links:

- Visa liberalisation with the Eastern neighbourhood (2014): <http://www.ecfr.eu/scorecard/2014/wider/44>
- Lifting the EU's visa requirement for citizens of Ukraine still unresolved: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/lifting-the-eu-s-visa-requirement-for-citizens-of-ukraine-still-unresolved>
- Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga - the Picture is Not That Dark: <http://www.ceid.hu/ukraine-and-the-eastern-partnership-summit-in-riga-the-picture-is-not-that-dark/>

Not too much enthusiasm for an EU army...

At present, there is no high-level public discussion in Hungary about the need for a unified EU army. However, the general official position of the Hungarian government is critical to the further deepening of EU integration in general. Instead, Budapest frequently emphasises the importance of maintaining the sovereignty of the member states.

Besides, according to the relevant policy documents of Hungary, Budapest considers NATO to be the primary guarantor of its military security and defence. Hence, in line with the alliance's perception of Russia as a source of increasing threat, Budapest was fully supportive of the Wales declaration, among them the stationing of NATO troops in the Baltic States and the establishment of a Very High Readiness Task Force. Besides, in line with the Wales decisions, Budapest committed itself to in-

crease its military spending; moreover, from September 2015 JAS-39 Gripen fighters of the Hungarian Air Force will contribute to the defence of the airspace of the Baltic States. In addition to all these, Hungarian defence and special forces started to dedicate particular attention to the threat from Russia's so-called hybrid warfare too. However, all these activities have been and will be conducted decisively in the framework of NATO.

These two factors implicitly mean that Budapest would be against the idea of setting up a unified EU army, even though there is no publicly available specific official position on the issue. Instead, Budapest would probably emphasise the importance of NATO in guaranteeing the security and defence of Europe.

Links:

- Hungary's National Security Strategy: [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Hongrie - 2012 - National Security Strategy.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Hongrie_-_2012_-_National_Security_Strategy.pdf)
- Hungary's National Military Strategy: http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/b/ae/e0000/national_military_strategy.pdf

2. EU Enlargement

More scepticism about Eastern enlargement

While fully supportive of the EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans, Hungary had been somewhat sceptical towards the Eastern enlargement even before the beginning of the Ukraine crisis. Hence, the breakout of the crisis and the subsequent war only added to the existing reluctance and scepticism of Hungarian elites and public about whether countries of Eastern Europe should ever be admitted to the European Union.

This is particularly so because the Orbán government – largely in common with its predecessors – intends to maintain good relations with Russia, and perceives the situation in Ukraine through the lens of Hungary's Russia-related interests. This policy, however, is not motivated by a value-related choice, but decisively by economic interests, mainly by energy-related considerations. And, as Russia is strongly opposed to the EU's Eastern Partnership gaining too much influence in the Eastern neighbourhood, Hungary cannot afford pursuing an enlargement-oriented Eastern policy in the region without risking alienation with Moscow.

Moreover, the often Russia-sympathetic policy of the government is further challenged by the strongest opposition party, the far-right Jobbik, which pursues an openly pro-Russian, anti-Western and anti-Kyiv foreign policy and reportedly has close connections to the Kremlin. The pressure from Jobbik may constitute an important factor pushing the Orbán government to make unusually radical remarks about Ukraine (questioning the future of Ukraine as a state, demanding autonomy for Transcarpathia while fighting in the East had just begun, etc.) in order not to let the radical party dominate the communication agenda. Leftist parties (Democratic Coalition, Hungarian Socialist Party) support the EU's eastward enlargement but often underline the importance of preserving regional stability during the process. Smaller liberal and green parties are unambiguously in favour of enlargement, especially in the light of Russian aggression.

Links:

- Orbán: autonomy of Hungarian minority in Ukraine needed for stability: <http://www.politics.hu/20140517/orban-on-autonomy-forex-borrowers-new-govt/>
- European Far Right and Putin: <http://www.aspeninstitute.cz/en/article/3-2014-european-far-right-and-putin/>

Integration to fight migration?

In case of EU enlargement toward the Western Balkans and Turkey, the Hungarian government has declared its continuous support for the process. The Hungarian foreign minister suggested accelerating EU accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro and starting accession talks with Macedonia as well.

Beside its geographic proximity, the region is considered to have key importance for the future of Hungary and Central Europe's energy security. Turkey as a newly emerging economic power of the

region is also considered an important target partner of the Hungarian ‘Eastern opening’ policy, aiming at strengthening economic ties with extra-EU countries.

Recently, the main arguments for rapid integration of the Western Balkans are connected to migration and security issues: it would help to manage the migration pressure on the European Union and help containing the flow of foreign fighters recruited for the Islamic State as well. The building of a fence preventing illegal border-crossings on the Serbian border of Hungary has raised some tension between the two countries. It was, however, eased after joint government declarations on further co-operation and stronger support for Serbia’s EU integration. Hungarian police helps to patrol the Serbian-Macedonian border as well.

Links:

- Péter Szijjártó supports acceleration of EU enlargement: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/peter-szijjarto-supports-acceleration-of-eu-enlargement>
- Hungary backs Turkey’s EU membership: <http://www.worldbulletin.net/hungary-backs-turkeys-eu-membership/153836/hungary-backs-turkeys-eu-membership>

EU-28 Watch

On the project

This EU-28 Watch is part of the a project called Eastern Neighbours and Russia: Close links with EU citizens (ENURC) in collaboration with TEPESA. The project focuses on developing EU citizens' understanding of the topic of the Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia and aims at encouraging their interest and involvement in this policy which has an impact on their daily lives.

The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out the discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states are invited to give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2015. Most of the reports were delivered in June 2015. This issue and all previous issues are available on the recently relaunched EU-28 Watch website: www.EU-28Watch.org.

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