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Hungary's Eastern Policy and the Migration Crisis on the Eastern Border of the European Union

The Hungarian authorities, while expressing their solidarity with the countries affected by the migration crisis on the border with Belarus (namely Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland), do not recognize Alexander Lukashenko's responsibility for causing it. The events on the eastern borders of the European Union did not in any way affect the Hungarian involvement in relations with the countries of the East. Péter Szijjártó, the head of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited Russia seven times this year, including four times since the beginning of the migration crisis.

Hungarian-Russian relations. Péter Szijjártó and Sergey Lavrov met at least six times in the last six months. It is telling that the meetings organized during the Hungarian presidency of the V4 are crowned with a trip by the head of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Russia or to other eastern countries, mainly from the former USSR. This was the case after the summit of the V4 heads of government and the president of Egypt (October 12, 2021). After the summit, Szijjártó flew to Moscow, to the headquarters of Rosatom, where he talked about the nuclear power plant in Paks. A few hours later he returned, but the next day he visited Russia again, this time to participate in Russia Energy Week. A month later, after the summit of the V4 heads of government and the president of South Korea (November 4, 2021), Szijjártó flew to Kyrgyzstan for the European Union-Central Asia Economic Forum. It is worth noting that during a press conference in Budapest, the prime ministers of the V4 states pointed to the threats of Gazprom's aggressive policy. It was no coincidence that the headquarters of Gazprom in Bishkek were placed in the film promoting this event.

On December 2, 2021, Péter Szijjártó met with Sergei Lavrov in Stockholm during the summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Hungarian minister stated that 2021 is extremely successful for Hungarian-Russian relations, as Hungary purchased Sputnik V vaccines and signed a long-term gas contract with Russia. It was during the OSCE summit that Lavrov announced that the Russian Federation would soon present proposals for agreements that would preclude any expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance to the East. At the same time, Russian troops were grouping at the Ukrainian borders.

In Hungary, the Sputnik Light vaccine is currently being tested, which can be given as a third immunization against COVID-19. On the other hand, Sputnik V will be manufactured in the Hungarian national drug factory from 2022. Szijjártó spoke about Sputnik V in an interview for Russia Today on November 28 this year. The minister then pointed out that the attitude of the EU and the EMA towards Sputnik V was due to political conditions, while his decision to allow the use of the Russian vaccine was dictated by the need to save human lives. He also emphasized the fact that in the initial phase of popularizing vaccines, Western producers delayed deliveries for several weeks. In the case of Sputnik V and the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine, deliveries were made two months earlier. Szijjártó also pointed out that he had many meetings with Western politicians who, during face-to-face talks, assessed the Russian Sputnik V vaccine as effective, and appreciated the scientific level of Russia. However, the same politicians, speaking in public, presented a different position – which the Hungarian foreign minister called hypocrisy.

Another important issue in Hungarian-Russian relations is the long-term gas agreement with Russia for blue fuel supplies, which has been in force since October 1. Despite Gazprom's aggressive policy on European markets, including the ETS market, the Hungarian authorities do not perceive this problem as actually existing. Moreover, government spokespersons report that thanks to the policy of the Hungarian state, energy prices have been steadily lowered (see also ["IEŚ Commentaries," no. 455](#)).

Belarusian-Hungarian bilateral relations. More than a year and a half ago, on June 5, 2020, Viktor Orbán paid his first visit to Minsk, during which he pledged to strengthen Hungarian-Belarusian cooperation. He also called for the lifting of sanctions against Belarus. Despite the fact that the Hungarian state currently supports sanctions against

both Russia and Belarus, the opinion in Hungary remains unchanged that sanctions do not solve any problems – what is more, they usually mean economic losses for the region of Central Europe. To this day, the Hungarian authorities have not firmly condemned Lukashenka's brutal policy towards the Belarusian people, and the topic of Belarus does not appear in the political or media space.

Minister Péter Szijjártó has repeatedly emphasized the friendly relations between him and the head of Belarusian diplomacy, Uladzimir Makiej. The first mention of the “critical” moment for EU-Belarus relations appeared on October 6, 2020 on Facebook.com. Péter Szijjártó then wrote that he was talking by phone to “his colleague” from Belarus, the head of the local Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Makiej. As he emphasized, both politicians have a particularly close, personal relationship and therefore they can talk honestly. The conversation concerned issues related to the internal situation in Belarus at that time. Importantly, it was already a time when Lukashenka's regime dealt bloodily with the opposition, which did not recognize the election results. The two politicians met again on September 24, 2021 in New York, on the occasion of the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Their conversation began with a friendly embrace recorded by Belarusian TV cameras. Interestingly, this meeting was not reported in the Hungarian media.

The crisis on the eastern border of the EU and the political narrative. From the very beginning, the prime minister's statements, regarding the situation on the borders of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland with Belarus, like those of the head of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, do not contain any references to who is responsible for the migration crisis at the EU's eastern borders. For the Hungarian authorities, this is simply another stage of the migration crisis. It is identified with what happened in 2015, when migrants reached Hungary via the Balkan route. During the XXIX Congress of the Fidesz party, which took place on November 14 this year in Budapest, Szijjártó stated that Europe was under migratory pressure from all directions and added: “We Hungarians were under it in 2015 and now Poles are bravely defending the borders. Many thanks and respect for the Poles, as well as the Polish government and Polish officials, that by defending us, they are defending Europe.” The same message was articulated during the above-mentioned interview for Russia Today, in which Szijjártó explained that the current situation on the border with Belarus is the same as in 2015, and that for over six years the EU has not changed its position on migration policy and the current migration crises are a consequence of this.

The riots at the Kuźnica-Bruzgi border crossing have been compared directly to the events on the Hungarian-Serbian border in Röszke-Horgos (September 16, 2015), when migrants tried to cross the border's barbed wire and break into Hungary. At that time, however, no foreign forces inspired the riots, nor did they equip the migrants with makeshift weapons that could be used to attack the Hungarian services. This type of narrative detracts from what is happening at the EU's eastern borders. In 2015, during the migration crisis, migrants passed through Hungary towards the border with Austria and further to Germany; however, the authorities of neighbouring Serbia did not smuggle people to the border, did not inspire an attack on the border, and did not arm the migrants.

Summary. Hungary's attitude to the events on EU's eastern border requires the country to balance between the EU and NATO structures, on the one hand, and relations with its partners from Russia, which are important for Hungary, and other Eastern countries, on the other. The goal of the Hungarian authorities is to constantly emphasize the effectiveness of their own policies and political reflections from 2015 and beyond. The Hungarian authorities emphasize that so far, the country has spent EUR 1.5 billion on security, while for projects related to border management, it received only EUR 59.3 million from the EU budget in 2014-2020. So far, neither the prime minister nor the head of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recognized the responsibility of the Lukashenka regime for the migration crisis on the EU's eastern border. Szijjártó also failed to do so during the quoted interview for Russian television. During the NATO summit in Riga, one of the most important challenges for the alliance was the protection of the EU's eastern border, but also the southern – Hungarian – border, and the possibility of renewing the Balkan route, as one of the most important challenges for the alliance.