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## **Identifying the rationalities behind Hungary's policy on the Russo-Ukrainian war**

### **Identyfikacja determinantów polityki Węgier względem wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

The research objective of this article was to uncover the rationalities of Hungary's policy towards the full-scale phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war, as well as related issues, while deliberately avoiding the common pitfalls in this field of oversimplification, politicisation, and analyses framed from a single-cause perspective. The analysis was conducted on the basis of rational choice theory, as adapted for the purposes of *Foreign Policy Analysis*, employing holistic causal reasoning without reference to any particular theory of international relations. It also drew upon insights derived from numerous expert seminars addressing the research problem, unstructured expert interviews, a critical review of the literature, and the analysis of primary sources. As a result of the research, several key domains influencing the formation of Hungarian foreign policy regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war were identified, namely: geopolitical and geographical preconditioning, historical experience, anticipation of shifts in the international order, policy towards the Hungarian minority in neighbouring states, energy policy, and domestic factors. These domains, however, are not isolated from one another; they frequently intersect and mutually condition one another, encompassing both objective and subjective components.

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**KEYWORDS:**

*Hungary, foreign policy, security policy, Russia, Ukraine, Russia–Ukraine war, NATO, European Union*

**STRESZCZENIE:**

Celem badawczym niniejszego artykułu była identyfikacja przyczyn polityki Węgier wobec pełnoskalowej fazy wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej oraz kwestii pokrewnych, przy jednoczesnym unikaniu częstej w przypadku tej problematyki symplifikacji, polityzacji i analiz prowadzonych z perspektywy jednej przyczyny. Analizę przeprowadzono w oparciu o zaadaptowaną na potrzeby *Foreign Policy Analysis* teorię racjonalnego wyboru, rozumowanie przyczynowo-skutkowe w ujęciu holistycznym, bez odwołania do jednej konkretnej teorii stosunków międzynarodowych, a także wnioski wyciągnięte z licznych seminariów eksperckich dotyczących badanego problemu, nieustrukturyzowane wywiady eksperckie, krytyczny przegląd literatury oraz analizę danych źródłowych. W wyniku badań zidentyfikowano kluczowe dla kształtowania polityki zagranicznej Węgier obszary, do których należą: usytuowanie geopolityczne i geograficzne, doświadczenie historyczne, antycypacja kierunku zmian ładu międzynarodowego, polityka wobec mniejszości węgierskiej w państwach sąsiednich, polityka energetyczna oraz czynniki wewnętrzne. Obszary te nie są jednak od siebie odizolowane – często wzajemnie się przenikają i warunkują. Zawierają w sobie komponent zarówno obiektywny, jak i subiektywny.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**

*Węgry, polityka zagraniczna, polityka bezpieczeństwa, Rosja, Ukraina, wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska, NATO, Unia Europejska*

## Introduction

Hungary's policy in response to the full-scale phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war has emerged as a subject of sustained scrutiny within public discourse, as well as within political, analytical, and academic circles. Yet, as a profoundly contentious issue, it is frequently subject to politicisation, engendering categorical judgements and definitive interpretations of its underlying nature. The sources of controversy surrounding Hungary's stance derive primarily from its divergence from the prevailing Western<sup>1</sup> mainstream, which has

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of analytical clarity and scholarly precision, whenever reference is made in this paper to the Western community, it shall denote the member states of the European Union and NATO, although the authors are fully aware that the term carries a much broader conceptual scope.

largely prioritised unequivocal support for Ukraine<sup>2</sup> over the preservation of pragmatic relations with Russia. In certain respects, this policy has also been criticised for its ostensibly amoral orientation, expressed through the relativisation of Russia's agency and culpability in the conflict.

However, the Western approach to the Russo-Ukrainian war extends beyond the binary framework of supporting Ukraine and sanctioning Russia. A crucial dimension encompasses NATO's measures aimed at reinforcing collective defence and deterring Russian aggression, alongside broader Western strategies vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China. Consequently, the controversies surrounding Hungary's position also pertain to these wider facets of Western policy, which collectively constitute the strategic architecture of its response to the war.

Nevertheless, scholarly objectivity necessitates an interpretation of Hungary's policy that recognises its multifaceted and often internally ambivalent character – rather than reducing it to a simplistic deviation from Western consensus. This article, therefore, engages with the research problem of elucidating the ambiguities inherent in Hungary's approach to the Russo-Ukrainian war, and, more broadly, in its posture towards Western responses both to the conflict itself and to the evolving security dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that have emerged in its aftermath. In this context, the authors pose the principal research question: What are the underlying rationalities and driving forces shaping Hungary's foreign policy in relation to the Russo-Ukrainian war? This central inquiry is complemented by several subsidiary questions, namely: Why has Hungary diverged from the Western mainstream approach towards Russia? Why does it refrain from offering unequivocal support to Ukraine? What specific vulnerabilities and advantages influence the direction of Hungary's policy towards the Russo-Ukrainian conflict? Furthermore, the study seeks to address more detailed issues, such as: What accounts for Hungary's hesitation regarding the European Union's sanctions against Russia? Why did Hungary exercise its veto over Sweden's accession to NATO?

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<sup>2</sup> This understanding was certainly reflected in the Western narrative surrounding the war, as well as – more broadly – in the practical measures undertaken both to support Ukraine and to counter Russia. A notable departure from this unified Western policy emerged only later, under the administration of US President Donald Trump and the government of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico.

## 1. Methodological approach: Research objectives, methods, and structure of the paper

The principal objective of this article is to elucidate the underlying logic of Hungary's policy towards the Russo-Ukrainian war. Drawing upon the analytical framework of Rational Choice Theory, as applied within the field of Foreign Policy Analysis<sup>3</sup>, the authors seek to identify the rational premises shaping Hungary's conduct towards Russia and Ukraine, as well as its positioning within the institutional frameworks of the European Union (EU) and NATO.

The identification of the rational motivations<sup>4</sup> informing Hungary's policy rests upon causal reasoning. However, the authors deliberately refrain from embedding their abductive reasoning within any single theoretical paradigm of international relations. Instead, a holistic analytical approach has been adopted – one that integrates both internal and external determinants of foreign policy behaviour, in the spirit of liberal and realist paradigms and, where appropriate, incorporates constructivist insights<sup>5</sup>. This theoretical eclecticism corresponds with the methodological design of the study, which includes unstructured expert interviews conducted by one of the authors in Hungary between August and October 2023<sup>6</sup>. The empirical

<sup>3</sup> M. Breuning, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative Introduction*, New York 2007; Ch. Pursiainen, T. Forsberg, *The Psychology of Foreign Policy*, London 2021.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of *rationality* is understood in a broad sense, encompassing strategic calculation, regime survival, identity-based reasoning, and other forms of purposive logic. By referring to the principal determinants of Hungary's foreign policy as *rationalities*, the authors underscore their intention to uncover the underlying logic behind specific actions and behaviours – that is, to interpret them through the lens of rational choice theory and in the spirit of “acting for gain”, whether such gain pertains to domestic politics, the international environment, or the particular objectives of the ruling party and its leaders.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in the context of securitisation: B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A new framework for analysis*, Boulder 1998.

<sup>6</sup> The total number of interviews conducted was 29. However, due to their comprehensive and cognitive value, 17 of these were compiled and catalogued for the purpose of this article. The interviews were unstructured, yet the questions revolved around a general core related to the subject of the present study. Each interview began with broad questions concerning the identification of the underlying causes of Hungary's foreign policy, thereby allowing respondents to articulate these causes independently and avoiding any influence that might arise from suggesting specific determinants. The subsequent stages of the interviews involved a more in-depth exploration of the particular dimensions indicated by the respondents themselves. This approach made it possible to identify the key

material was further enriched through participation in a series of academic seminars, policy conferences, and closed-door discussions with scholars, analysts, and policymakers – some held under the Chatham House Rule – addressing issues directly related to the research problem examined in this article. All of these engagements took place after 24 February 2022.

At the same time, the authors acknowledge the epistemological and practical limitations inherent in applying Rational Choice Theory to foreign policy analysis, and do not contend that the findings presented here offer an exhaustive or exclusive explanation of Hungary's external conduct in the context under consideration<sup>7</sup>. Rather, the empirical data gathered through fieldwork have been employed to delineate several core areas – identified as the principal determinants of Hungary's policy towards the war in Ukraine – which collectively constitute the analytical foundation of this study. These findings are complemented by secondary empirical sources, relevant academic literature, sectoral analyses, and direct observation. The article's structure follows these principal areas of inquiry, although it must be emphasised that this division is primarily analytical: the various determinants of Hungary's policy are deeply interwoven and mutually constitutive. The structure of the article follows a clear and coherent logical progression. It begins with

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rationalities underpinning Hungary's foreign policy. The vast majority of respondents, without any prompting, pointed to similar underlying motives behind Hungary's actions, which in turn enabled the identification of the most salient areas of inquiry. The interviewees were predominantly drawn from the academic sector; however, the expertise of the participants also encompassed independent analysts, representatives of think tanks, former military officers, investigative journalists, and ex-officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The respondents were chosen based on their recognised expertise in Hungary's foreign and security policy, identified through a detailed analysis of their professional backgrounds conducted by the authors. The empirical material for this study was anonymised and remains in the possession of the authors.

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as several experts indicated during interviews, the true underlying motives behind Hungary's policy may ultimately remain unknown or may not necessarily be rational. This caveat emerged as a relatively frequent conclusion in the course of the interviews. Among the explanations advanced were alleged activities of foreign intelligence services, corruption-related factors, and emotional or moral considerations. See expert interviews: HUFP/2023/8/27/2, HUFP/2023/8/29/3, HUFP/2023/9/1/4; HUFP/2023/9/12/7; HUFP/2023/9/21/11; HUFP/2023/9/25/13; HUFP/2023/9/27/14; HUFP/2023/10/19/17. One expert even observed that the lack of support for Ukraine appeared to be "abnormal" for Hungary, given its historical tradition of supporting various national liberation movements (HUFP/2023/9/1/4). On the broader question of emotional determinants in Hungary's policy towards Ukraine, see, e.g., A. Hettyey, *Collective Narcissism and Hungary's Kin-State Policy after 2010*, "Nationalities Papers" 2024, vol. 52, no. 5.

a concise overview of Hungary's foreign policy towards Russia, Ukraine, and the West – dimensions that constitute inseparable components of what the authors identify as Hungary's overall policy vis-à-vis the Russo-Ukrainian war. Subsequently, the authors analyse and explain the rationale behind the formulation and implementation of this policy, identifying the principal rationalities underpinning Hungary's conduct in the international arena.

The authors wish to make it clear that the aim of the present study is not to provide a detailed description or analysis of each of the identified categories determining Hungary's foreign policy, but merely to establish and delineate them. A comprehensive examination of these categories would necessitate a study extending well beyond the scope of a journal article and would more appropriately constitute the subject of a monograph. Consequently, the authors refer readers to a range of scholarly works that examine the issues discussed herein in greater depth.

## **2. Hungary's policy toward the Russo-Ukrainian war**

Since the authors' objective is not to provide the reader with a detailed account of Hungary's foreign and security policy towards the Russo-Ukrainian war and related issues<sup>8</sup>, but rather to present an interpretative framework and to identify its determinants, this section outlines only its general contours, principal directions of action, and the issues that give rise to interpretative ambiguities.

### **Hungary's policy towards Ukraine**

Following the regime change in 1990, Hungary's approach towards Ukraine was initially characterised by openness. Until the mid-2010s, Budapest

<sup>8</sup> It has already been extensively discussed in the scholarly literature. See, e.g., T. Csiki et al. (eds.), *A magyar külpolitika 1989–2014*, Budapest 2017; T. Csiki, *Az orosz–ukrán háború hatása Magyarországra*, “Nemzet és biztonság” 2024, vol. 17, no. 2; A. Hettyey, *Az Európai Unió realista fordulata és a magyar külpolitika*, “Nemzet és biztonság” 2024, vol. 17, no. 1; P. Müller, P. Slominski, *Hungary, the EU and Russia's War Against Ukraine: The Changing Dynamics of EU Foreign Policymaking*, [in:] C. Wiesner, M. Knodt (eds.), *The War Against Ukraine and the EU*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024; A. Schmidt, V. Glied, *Pragmatic foreign policy of Hungary in the shadow of the Russian-Ukrainian war*, “Eastern Journal of European Studies” 2024, vol. 15.

remained one of the principal advocates of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration<sup>9</sup>. However, tensions began to emerge in relation to the status of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine. The first contentious issue concerned the question of dual citizenship. Following Fidesz's electoral victory in 2010, the Hungarian government actively encouraged ethnic Hungarians residing in neighbouring states to acquire Hungarian citizenship. Owing to constitutional provisions in Ukraine, however, this policy could not be officially implemented<sup>10</sup>.

Prime Minister Orbán's victory speech in 2014 further exacerbated the situation, as he emphasised the significance of autonomy for Hungarians living in Ukraine<sup>11</sup>. Relations deteriorated sharply following the adoption of Ukraine's minority-related legislation – initially in 2017, which curtailed the right of ethnic minorities to receive education in their native languages at the primary and secondary levels, and subsequently in 2019, which restricted the public use of minority languages to private and religious contexts. In response, the Hungarian government began obstructing NATO–Ukraine meetings at the highest political level<sup>12</sup> and formally blocking any of Ukraine's accession negotiations with both NATO and the European Union. This tense bilateral environment persisted until 2022 and substantially influenced Hungary's approach to the ensuing large-scale phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

After the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion, V. Orbán advocated what he described as a policy of "strategic calmness"<sup>13</sup>. He confirmed Hungary's willingness to endorse EU sanctions against Russia but explicitly ruled out the provision of military assistance to Ukraine.

Since 2022, Hungary's policy towards Ukraine has manifested along two parallel dimensions. At the level of high politics and official communication,

<sup>9</sup> T. Csiki et al. (eds.), op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> ЗАКОН УКРАЇНИ, Про громадянство України, (Відомості Верховної Ради України (БВР), 2001, № 13, ст.65) [ZAKON UKRAYINY, Pro hromadyanstvo Ukrayiny, (Vidomosti Verkhovnoyi Rady Ukrayiny (VVR), 2001, № 13, st.65)].

<sup>11</sup> Orbán Viktor beszéde a miniszterelnöki eskütételről követően, Kormany.hu, 2 May 2014, <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/miniszterelnok/beszedek-publika/ciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-a-miniszterelnoki-eskutetelet-kovetoen> [15.10. 2025].

<sup>12</sup> I. Csernicskó, *Ukrajna nemzetközi kötelezettségvállalásai a kisebbségek nyelvén folyó oktatás területén a Keretegyezmény és a Karta alkalmazásáról* készült jelentések tükrében, "Kisebbségi Szemle" 2018, vol. 3, no. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Rendkívüli interjú Orbán Viktor miniszterelnökkel, M1Híradó, 27 February 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXBwrijKxdZE> [15.10.2025].

Budapest has consistently attributed responsibility to Kyiv for prolonging the conflict, undermining the rights of ethnic Hungarians, and threatening Hungary's energy security<sup>14</sup>. Of particular significance was Hungary's continued obstruction of the European Union's European Peace Facility, its veto of the Macro-Financial Assistance Instrument for Ukraine<sup>15</sup>, and its initiation of legal proceedings contesting the EU's decision to allocate billions of euros in aid to Ukraine derived from frozen Russian assets. Bilateral diplomatic relations have been further strained by reciprocal expulsions of diplomats; in May 2025, both states expelled two members of each other's diplomatic corps<sup>16</sup>, shortly after Ukraine announced that it had uncovered a spy network in the Transcarpathia region linked to the Hungarian secret services. Alleged Ukrainian actions targeting the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia in the summer of 2025 further compounded these tensions. Incidents such as the killing of a forcibly conscripted ethnic Hungarian by Ukrainian forces<sup>17</sup>, and the arson of a church accompanied by anti-Hungarian graffiti – although some analysts have interpreted the latter as a probable Russian false-flag operation – have been sharply condemned by Budapest.

The less visible dimension of Hungary's policy, however, reflects practical support for Ukraine. While refraining from military aid, Hungary has extended assistance through non-combat channels. Since the onset of the full-scale invasion, Hungary has allocated approximately 3.8 billion EUR to cover refugee-related expenses, amounting to 2.39% of the country's GDP. This positioned Hungary as the tenth-largest donor globally in relation to national

<sup>14</sup> In the energy sector, the Hungarian government has demonstrated particular sensitivity concerning the Druzhba pipeline. *Ukraine attacks pipeline that sends Russian oil to Hungary and Slovakia*, The Guardian, 22 August 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/22/ukraine-attacks-pipeline-that-sends-russian-oil-to-hungary-and-slovakia> [15.10.2025].

<sup>15</sup> "Hungary [...] vetoed it, mostly as a bargaining chip to obtain concessions from the Commission on an unrelated measure". See more: F. Fabbrini, *Funding the war in Ukraine: The European Peace Facility, the Macro-Financial Assistance instrument, and the slow rise of an EU fiscal capacity*, "Politics and Governance" 2023, vol. 11, no. 4; P. Müller, P. Słominśki, *The soft hostage-taking of EU foreign policy: Hungary's rule of law conflict with the EU and Russia's war against Ukraine*, "Journal of European Public Policy" 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Szijjártó Péter kiutasított két, általa kémnek nevezett ukrán diplomatát, HVG.hu, 9 May 2025, [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20250509\\_szijjarto-peter-ukran-kemek-kiutasitas-ukrajna-ebx](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20250509_szijjarto-peter-ukran-kemek-kiutasitas-ukrajna-ebx) [15.10.2025].

<sup>17</sup> *Death of Ukrainian conscript prompts row with Hungary*, BBC, 11 July 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp3l22z5y2zo> [15.10.2025].

GDP. However, this ranking is largely attributable to refugee expenditure, as Hungary has provided Ukraine with only limited bilateral humanitarian assistance – around 50 million EUR (0.03% of GDP) – placing it ahead of only two EU member states, Malta and Cyprus, in terms of humanitarian, financial, and military assistance. Hungary's contribution through the EU's collective financial commitments to Ukraine should also be taken into account, amounting to 1.04 billion EUR (a further 0.65% of GDP). Excluding refugee-related costs, these combined figures still render Hungary the antepenultimate EU donor to Ukraine, ranking above only Ireland and Malta. Nonetheless, the gap between Hungary and the countries immediately ahead of it was less pronounced than in the case of bilateral aid allocations alone<sup>18</sup>. It should be borne in mind, however, that some data – particularly those concerning military assistance – remain undisclosed, and that while the Kiel Institute provides some of the most comprehensive available figures, its data are not free from notable methodological shortcomings<sup>19</sup>.

Hungary has also contributed to Ukraine's energy security by supplying, on a commercial basis, approximately 32% of its electricity imports and around 20% of its petroleum gas imports in the first half of 2025<sup>20</sup>. Medical assistance has been provided through the delivery of pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and ambulances, with Hungarian Interchurch Aid serving as a principal implementing organisation. Furthermore, Hungary hosts NATO's Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED COE), which contributes to the training and professional development of Ukrainian medical personnel.

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<sup>18</sup> Data covering allocations from 24 January 2022 to 31 August 2025 have been retrieved from: *A Database of Military, Financial & Humanitarian Aid Ukraine Support Tracker*, Kiel Institute, <https://www.kielinstitut.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/> [20.10.2025].

<sup>19</sup> See more in: K. Frymark, *German support for Ukraine: Taking the communications initiative*, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), 18 January 2023, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-01-18/german-support-ukraine-taking-communications-initiative> [20.10.2025].

<sup>20</sup> *Ukraine has spent 40 times more on energy imports than it earned from exports in the first half of 2025*, Dixigroup.org, 1 September 2025, <https://dixigroup.org/en/ukraine-has-spent-40-times-more-on-energy-imports-than-it-earned-from-exports-in-the-first-half-of-2025/> [19.10.2025].

### Hungary's policy towards Russia

Since 1990, Hungary's approach towards Moscow has been predominantly pragmatic. With the exception of a single parliamentary term<sup>21</sup>, all Hungarian prime ministers have held meetings with their Russian counterparts. Beyond issues related to energy imports – which will be addressed in a subsequent section – several significant Russian investment projects have been initiated in Hungary over the past decades<sup>22</sup>. Following the 2013–2014 crisis in Ukraine and the Russian occupation of Crimea – despite the Orbán government's formal condemnation of the aggression<sup>23</sup> – Hungary continued to pursue a pragmatic approach towards Moscow, a stance that, unlike in most EU member states, persisted even after the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. As part of its agenda, the Hungarian government consistently advocated for the swift negotiation of a ceasefire and repeatedly delayed the adoption of successive EU sanctions packages against Russia.

A central figure in sustaining Hungary's close relations with Moscow has been the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Péter Szijjártó, who has travelled to Russia on more than a dozen occasions since 2022<sup>24</sup>, most frequently to meet with his counterpart, Sergey Lavrov. At the level of high politics, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has also met with President Vladimir Putin twice since the outbreak of the war – once in Beijing and once in Moscow,

<sup>21</sup> Viktor Orbán's first term.

<sup>22</sup> The construction of the PAKS II nuclear power plant represents the most important and strategically consequential energy project in Hungary; however, Russian investments and economic links extend far beyond this single undertaking. See more on Russian investments in Hungary in: C. Weiner, *Energy Once Again in the Spotlight: New Forms of Russian Investment Presence in Hungary*, [in:] L.N. Shishelina, N.V. Korovitsyna, M.V. Vedernikov (eds.), *Rossiya i Tsentral'naya Evropa v novykh geopoliticheskikh real'nostyakh* (Россия и Центральная Европа в новых geopolитических реальностях), Moscow 2017; V. Józwiak, *Hungarian-Russian Economic Relations*, "PISM Bulletin" 2019, no. 105, <https://pism.pl/upload/images/artykuly/6ff616d1-3487-4fae-8e9c-3524d452549a/1570899639626.pdf>; A. Ámon, A. Deák, "Hungary and Russia in Economic Terms – Love, Business, Both or Neither?", [in:] J. Kucharczyk, G. Mesežníkov (eds.), *Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict*, Berlin 2015.

<sup>23</sup> *Az Ukránhoz fűződő magyar érdek változatlan*, Kormány.hu, 6 March 2014, <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/hirek/meg-marciusban-atadjak-a-szlovak-magyar-gazvezeteket> [4.11.2025].

<sup>24</sup> *Eddig bírta, összel ismét Moszkvába utazik Szijjártó Péter*, 444.hu, 6 June 2025, <https://444.hu/2025/06/06/eddig-birta-osszel-ismet-moszkvaba-utazik-szijjarto-peter> [15.10.2025].

during Hungary's presidency of the Council of the European Union<sup>25</sup> – an exceptional level of engagement among EU leaders.

In addition to delaying sanctions and seeking exemptions for Russian energy imports, Hungary has extended other gestures of goodwill towards Moscow. Notably, in 2019, the Russian-controlled International Investment Bank (IIB) was permitted to relocate its headquarters from Moscow to Budapest. Its employees were granted exemptions from taxes and social contributions, unrestricted entry into Hungary, and immunity from the supervision of Hungarian financial regulatory authorities; moreover, they were accorded diplomatic immunity<sup>26</sup>. Following the inclusion of three of the bank's executives on the United States sanctions list in 2023, Hungary decided to officially withdraw from the IIB<sup>27</sup>. In 2024, however, Fidesz once again made a decision that was questionable from an international security perspective by introducing a new immigration law extending eligibility to Russian and Belarusian citizens. Additionally, under pressure from Prime Minister Orbán, the European Union removed Patriarch Kirill, as well as other Russian citizens, including Gulbakhor Ismailova, Viatcheslav Moshe Kantor, Mikhail Degtyarev, and Vladimir Rashevsky, from the list of sanctioned individuals<sup>28</sup>. More broadly, Hungarian foreign policy has exhibited marked restraint in condemning Russia's actions. Whether in response to atrocities such as those committed in Bucha or to cyberattacks targeting the servers of Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Budapest's reactions have been conspicuously muted and devoid of tangible consequences.

<sup>25</sup> J. Bornio, A. Poznar, *Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's official visit to Russia*, "IEŚ Commentaries Brief" 2024, no. 135, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/kies-1160-en/> [17.09.2025].

<sup>26</sup> *Magyarország kilép a kémbanknak is nevezett Nemzetközi Beruházási Bankból*, Telex.hu, <https://telex.hu/gazdasag/2023/04/13/vg-magyarorszag-kilep-a-nemzetkozi-beruhazasi-bankbol> [18.10.2025].

<sup>27</sup> It has been alleged that this arrangement enabled Russian spies to move freely to Hungary and, consequently, into the Schengen area, earning the institute the moniker "Spy Bank".

<sup>28</sup> See more A. Bíró-Nagy (ed.), *Hungarian politics in 2022*, Policy Solutions, 2023, [https://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/Hungarian\\_Politics\\_in\\_2022\\_Final.pdf](https://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/Hungarian_Politics_in_2022_Final.pdf) [17.9.2025].

## Hungary's policy towards NATO and the US in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war

Since Hungary's accession to NATO in 1999, the Alliance has remained the cornerstone of the country's foreign and security policy<sup>29</sup>. Despite the ambiguous character of Hungary's policy towards Russia and Ukraine, the country participates – within the limits of its capabilities – in NATO's collective efforts in the fields of deterrence and defence, adopted by the Alliance following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2014. This participation is realised mainly through involvement in regional exercises, the fulfilment of rotation duties within the Baltic Air Policing Mission, and contributions to EU battlegroups<sup>30</sup>. Hungary is also both the host nation and framework nation for the NATO multinational battlegroup established after the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, the Multinational Division Centre Headquarters, responsible for operational command over the battlegroups deployed in Hungary and Slovakia, is located in the Hungarian city of Székesfehérvár<sup>31</sup>. As one expert emphasised, Hungary has never opposed the expansion of NATO's capabilities on the Eastern Flank<sup>32</sup>, and in fact, concrete actions demonstrate that it has even actively participated in their development. Hungary also contributes to strengthening NATO's overall potential through extensive investments in the defence sector, launched as early

<sup>29</sup> This point was clearly emphasised by experts during the interviews: HUFP/2023/9/11/5, HUFP/2023/9/11/6, HUFP/2023/9/18/10, HUFP/2023/9/21/11, HUFP/2023/10/10/16. When one expert was asked whether Hungary would fulfil its obligations under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, he replied that there was no doubt it would: HUFP/2023/9/11/5. At the same time, experts noted that Hungary's increasingly ambiguous policy towards Russia has led to a growing lack of trust in Hungary and Hungarian officers within NATO structures. Some respondents observed that the military environment remains dominated by a pro-Atlantic orientation (HUFP/2023/9/21/11, HUFP/2023/10/10/16) and that years of cooperation within NATO have generated a form of institutional memory (HUFP/2023/9/18/10). Simultaneously, however, a process of elite replacement within the armed forces appears to be underway, aimed at ensuring greater loyalty to the government: HUFP/2023/9/11/6, HUFP/2023/9/13/8.

<sup>30</sup> Although these activities do not formally operate under NATO's aegis, they align with the broader context of the West's deterrence policy.

<sup>31</sup> *Elérte teljes műveleti képességét a Közép-európai Többnemzeti Hadosztály-parancsnokság*, Honvedelem.hu, 10 February 2025, <https://honvedelem.hu/hirek/elerte-teljes-muveleti-kepessegét-a-kozep-europai-tobbnemzeti-hadosztaly-parancsnoksag.html> [15.10.2025].

<sup>32</sup> HUFP/2023/9/11/6.

as 2016<sup>33</sup>. Most of these initiatives are based on cooperation with Germany, including both German direct investments and Hungary's efforts to expand its own defence industrial base<sup>34</sup>.

Referring to Hungary's allied policy, some experts have expressed strong scepticism regarding Hungary's cooperation with the United States, attributing it to the challenges posed by what they describe as the great-power, or even imperial, tendencies of American foreign policy, which may prove detrimental to the interests of smaller actors in international relations<sup>35</sup>. This scepticism, in turn, translates into limited defence procurement from American suppliers. One expert summarised the Hungarian approach by stating: "First, in Europe, we must reach a consensus that the interests of the United States, Russia, and China are not identical with our European interests – and only then can we define those interests ourselves"<sup>36</sup>.

A fundamental question to be addressed in the context of Hungary's allied and defence policy concerns the objectives underlying the development of its military capabilities. Interestingly, experts interviewed for this study pointed much more frequently to the erosion of the international order and the need to possess hard power in an unpredictable environment<sup>37</sup> than to a threat to NATO stemming directly from Russian actions. Other motives cited included the pursuit of greater autonomy from external suppliers,

<sup>33</sup> See P. Marton, *The Hungarian defence industry: between the past and plans*, [in:] J. Bornio (ed.), *The Defence Industry in the Visegrád Countries – Current State and Perspectives*, Lublin 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.; J. Bornio, *Inwestycje niemieckiego sektora zbrojeniowego na Węgrzech* (cz. 1), "Komentarze IEŚ" 2023, no. 250, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/inwestycje-niemieckiego-sektora-zbrojeniowego-na-wegrzech-cz-1/> [16.09.2025]; idem, *Inwestycje niemieckiego sektora zbrojeniowego na Węgrzech* (cz. 2), "Komentarze IEŚ" 2023, no. 251, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/inwestycje-niemieckiego-sektora-zbrojeniowego-na-wegrzech-cz-2/> [16.09.2025].

<sup>35</sup> HUFP/2023/8/27/2, HUFP/2023/9/11/5, HUFP/2023/9/11/6. As early as September 2023, one expert suggested that the United States was preparing for a peace settlement with Russia that would involve sacrificing part of Ukraine's territory, and that this strategy would likely accelerate in the event of a Republican victory (HUFP/2023/9/11/5). Another expert pointed to the challenges facing Europe as a result of the US strategic pivot to the Pacific (HUFP/2023/9/11/5). Similar views – combined with a pronounced lack of trust in the United States – are widely represented within the Hungarian expert community, as the authors were able to observe during their participation in numerous closed expert seminars.

<sup>36</sup> HUFP/2023/9/11/6.

<sup>37</sup> HUFP/2023/9/11/5, HUFP/2023/9/12/7. Also in the context of Hungary's interests in the Balkans and the potential destabilisation of the situation in this region, HUFP/2023/9/26/12.

diversification of armaments' supply sources<sup>38</sup>, and the economic benefits associated with stimulating growth through investment in the defence industry<sup>39</sup>. The fact that the experts emphasised these motives behind Hungary's actions naturally raises legitimate questions regarding the true motivations of the country's policies.

The greatest controversy and interpretative ambiguity, however, has been generated by Hungary's veto of Sweden's accession to NATO. Hungary was the last member state to ratify the accession treaty<sup>40</sup>, which understandably raised questions concerning its allied loyalty and its commitment to NATO's deterrence policy towards Russia. Further controversy arose from the Hungarian government's refusal to permit the stationing of NATO units east of the Danube River. It should be noted, however, that this decision was largely symbolic and of limited operational significance; in fact, it was subsequently revoked and ceased to have any effect<sup>41</sup>.

### 3. Geography and geopolitics

The geopolitical location and geographical factors of individual states are some of the principal factors determining their foreign and security policy<sup>42</sup>. Hungary is among a select number of countries on the so-called eastern flank of NATO that benefit from a unique geographical dividend in its relations with Russia. Its strategic location within the Carpathian basin confers upon it a distinct geopolitical depth, thereby mitigating the threats and challenges emanating from Russia's provocative actions. The Russian-Ukrainian front line itself is also at a considerable distance from Hungarian territory. With the exception of Ukraine, Hungary is bordered by stable states, the majority of

<sup>38</sup> HUFP/2023/9/13/8.

<sup>39</sup> HUFP/2023/8/29/3, HUFP/2023/9/11/6, HUFP/2023/10/10/16, HUFP/2023/10/19/17.

<sup>40</sup> It should be noted, however, that for a considerable period, Hungary was not the only state blocking Sweden's accession to NATO, and it did so only on 5 March 2024 – just over a month after Turkey.

<sup>41</sup> *Döntött a kormány, már az ország bármely részébe települhetnek NATO-csapatok*, Telex, 16 June 2022, <https://telex.hu/belfold/2022/06/16/fegyveres-erok-nato-csapatok-teljes-or-szag-magyarorszag> [15.10.2025].

<sup>42</sup> This factor emerged as a key element in several interviews: HUFP/2023/8/29/3, HUFP/2023/9/1/4, HUFP/2023/9/12/7, HUFP/2023/9/18/10, HUFP/2023/9/26/12, HUFP/2023/9/27/14, HUFP/2023/10/2/15.

which are members of the European Union. This phenomenon can be attributed to a comparatively diminished sense of threat from Russia in Hungary, in contrast to other CEE countries<sup>43</sup>. This factor is a contributing element to the Hungarian government's less confrontational policy towards Russia.

Hungary's geopolitical identity has historically been shaped by the Carpathian basin, which acted as a natural barrier protecting the state, in its various historical forms, from eastern expansion<sup>44</sup>. This geographical constraint also directed Hungary's natural strategic focus towards the Balkans, where it sought to advance its geopolitical agenda<sup>45</sup>. Consequently, Hungary has historically shown limited interest in eastern affairs and, *de facto*, has a limited understanding of issues concerning Ukraine and Russia<sup>46</sup>. The Balkan orientation, often pursued at the expense of eastern engagement<sup>47</sup>, remains a priority in contemporary Hungarian foreign policy, as demonstrated

<sup>43</sup> In Hungary, as many as 43% of citizens believe that Russia "does not currently pose a real threat to Central Europe", with a higher figure (45%) recorded only in Bulgaria in J. Pommerski, *Wobec Rosji i wojny na Ukrainie...*, Raporty IEŚ, no. 1, Instytut Europy Środkowej, 2023, <https://ies.lublin.pl/raporty/r2023-001/> [17.9.2025]. A similar trend emerges when considering the question of whether Russia poses a threat to the country. 60% of Hungarians do not see Russia as a threat. Among NATO's eastern flank countries, only Bulgaria (63%) scored higher. Among the Three Seas Initiative countries, only Croatia (73%) and Slovenia (80%) scored higher due to their geographical distance from Russia. However, in another survey, Hungarians perceived Ukraine (51%) as a greater threat to their security than Russia (46%). See A. Bíró-Nagy et al., *The World Through Hungarian Eyes: Foreign Policy Attitudes in Hungary in 2024*, Policy Solutions, 2024, [https://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/Policy\\_Solutions\\_The\\_World\\_Through\\_Hungarian\\_Eyes\\_2024.pdf](https://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/Policy_Solutions_The_World_Through_Hungarian_Eyes_2024.pdf) [17.09.2025]. This is not only due to geopolitical considerations but also to the Hungarian government's systemic narrative that relativises the causes of the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

<sup>44</sup> Russia's intervention in Hungarian history is limited to the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–1849, which occurred at the behest of Austria. Subsequently, Russia's involvement in Hungary was restricted to the 20th century, during the both World Wars and the Cold War. The regions beyond the Carpathian Mountains – as seen from the perspective of Budapest – that belonged to Austria-Hungary were not subject to Hungarian administration; rather, they were under Austrian jurisdiction.

<sup>45</sup> HUFP/2023/9/18/10, HUFP/2023/9/21/11.

<sup>46</sup> HUFP/2023/9/18/10.

<sup>47</sup> See further discussion on Hungary's opposition to prioritising Eastern European countries' EU accession over that of Western Balkan states in: J. Bornio, Ł. Lewkowicz, *The Tenth Three Seas Initiative Summit in Warsaw: Key Decisions and Prospects for Development*, "IEŚ Commentaries" 2025, no. 97, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/the-tenth-three-seas-initiative-summit-in-warsaw-key-decisions-and-prospects-for-development/> [18.09.2025].

by, i.e., efforts to promote the European integration of the Western Balkans and to orient the Visegrád Group towards cooperation with Balkan states.

Geopolitical considerations intersect with other factors, including the Hungarian diaspora abroad and historical issues, particularly due to Hungary's territorial losses following defeat in World War I. In this context, the Transcarpathian region within Ukraine remains of particular interest to Hungary. This is further illustrated by the fact that, following the onset of Russia's full-scale offensive and in the context of Hungary's ambiguous policy towards Ukraine, publications began to appear in analytical and media circles suggesting alleged Hungarian preparations or ambitions to annex Transcarpathia<sup>48</sup>. In May 2025, the SBU allegedly uncovered an agent network linked to one of Hungary's intelligence services. According to the SBU, the recruited agents were tasked with collecting information on the military security of the Transcarpathia region, identifying vulnerabilities in its land and air defences, and monitoring the political views and behaviour of the local population<sup>49</sup>. This development raised legitimate questions regarding why Hungary would seek such detailed military intelligence and has fuelled speculation that it might harbour ambitions of annexation, or that it could be providing this information to Russian intelligence services<sup>50</sup>. However, in the expert interviews conducted for this study, respondents categorically rejected the notion that the Hungarian government – or even the most radical members of Fidesz – planned or advocated the annexation of any part of Ukraine<sup>51</sup>. Nevertheless, the mere presence of this topic in analytical

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., *Peacekeeper or Invader? Hungarian Forces and the Future of Western Ukraine*, Robert Lansing Institute, 10 May 2025, <https://lansinginstitute.org/2025/05/10/peacekeeper-or-invader-hungarian-forces-and-the-future-of-western-ukraine/> [9.09.2025]; *Espionage, elections, ethnic tensions: What's behind the latest Hungary-Ukraine spat?*, Balkan Insight, 23 May 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/05/23/espionage-elections-ethnic-tension-whats-behind-the-latest-hungary-ukraine-spat/> [10.09.2025].

<sup>49</sup> СБУ вперше в історії України викрила агентурну мережу воєнної розвідки Угорщини [SBU uncovers Hungary's military intelligence network in Ukraine for the first time], Служба безпеки України [Security Service of Ukraine], 9 May 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhoZQHoeluc> [15.10.2025]. Another incident arose in September 2025, when Ukraine alleged that Hungarian drones had violated its airspace; the Hungarian government, however, denied these claims. Генеральний штаб ЗСУ / General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 26 September 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/GeneralStaff.ua/posts/1149381767374900> [15.10.2025].

<sup>50</sup> A third possibility is that the allegations are fabricated.

<sup>51</sup> HUFP/2023/9/1/4, HUFP/2023/9/11/5, HUFP/2023/9/12/7. In the authors' assessment, these theories do not withstand scrutiny when subjected to causal-logical reasoning. They

discourse demonstrates the firmly entrenched view of Hungary as a state focused on the Carpathian Basin. During the Lublin Eastern European Forum 2024, Hungarian analyst Péter Stepper even proposed the hypothesis that Hungary's "peace-oriented" policy was designed to prevent Russian attacks on areas of Transcarpathia inhabited by the Hungarian minority. This approach remained effective until August 2024, when fragments from downed Russian drones and missiles fell in the vicinity of Mukachevo<sup>52</sup>.

#### **4. Historical experience**

It would be a considerable oversimplification to attribute the determinants of state foreign policy solely to geographical factors, in the vein of geographical determinism. Nevertheless, geographical and geopolitical considerations undoubtedly shape the trajectory of historical developments, influence the political psyche of societies and elites, form traditions of geopolitical thought, and ultimately shape the formulation and execution of foreign and security policy. Within the context of the issues addressed in this article, Hungary's 20th-century historical experiences are particularly salient, most notably the repercussions of the two World Wars and the 1956 revolution<sup>53</sup>.

In the aftermath of World War I, Hungary was compelled on 4 June 1920 to ratify a peace treaty with the Entente powers, which imposed severe territorial losses, amounting to approximately 70% of pre-war Hungarian territory, including strategically significant areas with access to the sea. Within the newly demarcated borders of the Kingdom of Hungary, only around 35% of the pre-war population remained, while approximately one-third of ethnic

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completely overlook the potential responses of international organisations or other states to any attempt by Hungary to revise borders, and they fail to consider that the Hungarian armed forces deployed near the Ukrainian border could have been tasked with missions that were not necessarily offensive. It is, however, worth noting that one of the respondents acknowledged that, although the government had no plans to annex parts of Ukraine, in his view, such an action would have been pro-quality for Hungary's security. At the same time, he categorically excluded support for any revision of borders with other neighbouring states: HUFP/2023/9/1/4.

<sup>52</sup> Megtámadták Kárpátalját, Demokrata.hu, 17 November 2024, <https://demokrata.hu/magyarszeg/megtamadtak-karpataljat-912459> [9.09.2025].

<sup>53</sup> Historical factors were identified as one of the determinants of Hungary's foreign policy by the surveyed experts: HUFP/2023/9/13/8, HUFP/2023/9/18/10, HUFP/2023/9/26/13, HUFP/2023/10/2/15.

Hungarians were left outside the state. This enduring sense of grievance and revisionist aspiration subsequently propelled Hungary into alliance with the Axis powers and participation in World War II, which likewise culminated in defeat<sup>54</sup>.

The memory of this treaty and its consequences remains pervasively present in the Hungarian public<sup>55</sup> and scientific spheres, to such an extent that scholars have conceptualised the phenomenon as the “Trianon trauma”<sup>56</sup>. What is more significant, however, is that the issue continues to occupy a prominent place in political discourse. In V. Orbán’s commemorative narrative, the emphasis lies on a shared sense of grievance – marking 4 June as the Day of National Unity<sup>57</sup> – on standing up for Hungarians beyond the country’s borders, and on reinforcing the Hungarian conception of the cultural nation.

Hungarian government historical narratives maintain that the country’s involvement in both world wars was not a matter of volition, but rather the outcome of pressure from great powers and hegemonic rivalries<sup>58</sup>. The

<sup>54</sup> One of the surveyed experts particularly highlighted the personnel losses suffered by the Hungarian Second Army on the Eastern Front during World War II, drawing specific attention to the trauma of the Battle of the Don: HUFP/2023/10/2/15.

<sup>55</sup> Owing to the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon in 2020, numerous surveys were conducted to assess public perceptions of the event. According to these polls, 94% of respondents regarded the treaty as fundamentally unjustified and excessively harsh. See more: *A túlnyomó többség szerint igazságtalan és túlzó – a trianoni békészerződés a hazai közvéleményben*, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 2 June 2020, [https://mta.hu/tudoma\\_ny\\_hirei/a-trianoni-bekeszerzodes-a-hazai-kozvelemenyenben-110667](https://mta.hu/tudoma_ny_hirei/a-trianoni-bekeszerzodes-a-hazai-kozvelemenyenben-110667) [4.11.2025].

<sup>56</sup> É. Kovács, *Overcoming History through Trauma. The Hungarian Historikerstreit*, “European Review” 2016, vol. 24, no. 4; B. Ilg, *The representation of Trianon trauma as a chosen trauma in political newspapers (1920–2010) in Hungary*, “Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy” 2021, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 51–93; I.N. Sava, *From Political Nostalgia to Cultural Trauma? Hungary’s European Dilemma a Hundred Years After Trianon*, “Transylvanian Review” 2020, vol. 29, no. 3; A. Adamczyk, *Miedzy traumą Trianon a integralnością Korony św. Stefana. Koncepcje i próby odbudowy Wielkich Węgier 1920–1947*, “Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej” 2023, issue 3, pp. 193–213, [https://ies.lublin.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/riesw\\_2023-03-10.pdf](https://ies.lublin.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/riesw_2023-03-10.pdf) [18.09.2025]; B. Góralczyk, *Węgierski syndrom Trianon*, Warsaw 2020; D. Héjj, *Węgry na nowo*, Cracow 2022.

<sup>57</sup> I. Romsics, *A Birodalom ellen: Újrahangolt emlékezetpolitika Magyarországon*, “Korunk” 2024, vol. 35, no. 11.

<sup>58</sup> A prime example of this type of narrative is the Memorial for Victims of the German Occupation in Budapest, erected to commemorate the German invasion of Hungary in 1944, as well as the informational panels in the permanent exhibition at the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, which explicitly state that Hungary was “compelled” to cooperate with Germany and Italy during World War II.

Eastern Front was particularly salient in this context<sup>59</sup>, and the contemporary war in Ukraine naturally evokes analogous associations. The historically conditioned narrative of a potential risk of Hungary being drawn into conflict with Russia, purportedly at NATO/EU's behest, is prominently reflected in the discourse of the Hungarian government. The perceived threat of military entanglement featured prominently during the 2022 parliamentary election campaign, when Viktor Orbán characterised Péter Márki-Zay, the opposition leader, as the head of the so-called "party of war". This narrative subsequently re-emerged as a central motif in Hungary's 2024 European Parliamentary election campaign<sup>60</sup>, resonating strongly within the national consciousness. In 2023, 59% of Hungarian citizens expressed concern that their country could be "drawn into war"<sup>61</sup>; 54% considered a risk of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict escalating into a world war, while 55% judged the threat of nuclear weapons use to be real<sup>62</sup>. These historical experiences and collective memories have contributed to Hungary's persistent inclination to maintain distance from the Russo-Ukrainian war in its foreign policy. The "trauma of Trianon" provides a foundation for the particular orientation of Hungary's policy; it is evident that the event remains embedded in the nation's collective memory, expert discourse, and the narrative promoted by V. Orbán's government. However, regarding social perception, the same cannot be said of the traumas associated with the World War II, as no comparable public surveys on this subject exist. Some experts argue that this historical experience underpins Fidesz's policy approach and that it is undoubtedly reflected in the peace-oriented narrative articulated by Orbán himself.

A particularly formative episode in Hungary's historical consciousness, vis-à-vis Russia, is the 1956 revolution and its suppression by Soviet forces. This event has played a critical role in both the early narrative of Viktor Orbán<sup>63</sup> and in the national martyrology of the Hungarian people. Drawing direct analogies between contemporary Ukrainians defending themselves

<sup>59</sup> See footnote 55.

<sup>60</sup> A. Bíró-Nagy et al., op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> *According to the majority of Hungarians, the risk of a nuclear war is real*, Nézőpont Intézet, 24 March 2023, <https://nezopont.hu/en/what-we-do/political-poll/according-to-the-majority-of-hungarians-the-risk-of-a-nuclear-war-is-real> [10.09.2025].

<sup>63</sup> In 1989, V. Orbán delivered a speech at the reburial ceremony of Imre Nagy, during which he called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary.

against Russian aggression and the 1956 Hungarian insurgents is, however, politically sensitive for the government, which accordingly refrains from linking the two<sup>64</sup>. According to one interviewee, the narrative propagated by Fidesz-affiliated circles, which relativises the causes of the war in Ukraine, could easily have been leveraged to place sole responsibility on Russia and emphasise its antagonism. The historical experience of 1956 would provide a legitimate basis for such an interpretation<sup>65</sup>. The fact that this approach has not been adopted indicates that historical factors cannot, in any circumstance, serve as the sole interpretative lens for Hungary's policy towards the war in Ukraine. While they occasionally inform foreign policy considerations, they are often instrumentalised for broader strategic purposes.

## 5. Viktor Orbán's diagnosis of the current IR

Another critical factor to consider when interpreting states' foreign and security policies is the structural conditions of the international system<sup>66</sup>. Hungary's formulation of policy towards Ukraine coincided with a period of the emergence of a new multipolar international order. The unipolar moment – Charles Krauthammer's term for the post-Cold War predominance of the United States<sup>67</sup> – has evolved, primarily as a result of the rising power of the People's Republic of China, but also due to the increasing assertiveness of other international actors, including Russia, capable of reshaping their regional environments<sup>68</sup>. During the period examined in this article,

<sup>64</sup> In September 2024, Balázs Orbán, one of the chief advisors to the Hungarian Prime Minister, stated that "considering 1956, we would have probably not done what [Ukrainian] President [Volodymyr] Zelenskiy did 2 1/2 years ago, as it is irresponsible, as we can see that he led his country into a defensive war, many lives were lost and territories lost". The statement provoked outrage among segments of the public and opposition leaders. It was met with a swift reprimand from V. Orbán, who felt compelled to clarify his advisor's words, appeal for them not to be misinterpreted, and, above all, to dissociate the 1956 uprising from Hungary's policy towards the war in Ukraine.

<sup>65</sup> HUFP/2023/9/26/13.

<sup>66</sup> Identified as significant in the interviews: HUFP/2023/29/3, HUFP/2023/9/11/5, HUFP/2023/9/11/6, HUFP/2023/9/12/7, HUFP/2023/9/27/14.

<sup>67</sup> C. Krauthammer, *The Unipolar Moment*, "Foreign Affairs" 1990, vol. 70, no. 1.

<sup>68</sup> In the United States, this was openly acknowledged as early as Barack Obama's first year in office, with the reset with Russia serving as a concrete example of the changing reality. The shift in the international environment was further highlighted by the well-known

the process of multipolarisation remains ongoing. Consequently, the mechanisms that will ultimately shape future interstate relations are not yet fully known. Any analysis of Hungary's foreign policy in this structural context must, therefore, be based not so much on the objective state of the system at a given moment but on an anticipation of its prospective evolution.

During his second term in office (2010–2014), Viktor Orbán began to formulate a new foreign policy framework aimed at reassessing Hungary's position in global affairs. Following the appointment of Péter Szijjártó as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2014, the so-called "Global Opening" took a more explicit turn towards strengthening relations with the East. This approach was, in due course, rebranded as the "Eastern Opening" (keleti nyitás)<sup>69</sup>. This strategy was underpinned by the belief that the West was in relative decline<sup>70</sup>, that other centres of power were strengthening<sup>71</sup>, and that Hungary needed to exploit these developments to its advantage. Implicit in this reasoning is the assumption that Hungary is too small to shape the international order and must, therefore, adapt to it<sup>72</sup>. Within this doctrine, Russia occupies a particular position, largely due to Hungary's desire to develop energy relations with Moscow<sup>73</sup>.

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article by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. See H.R. Clinton, *America's Pacific century*, Foreign Policy, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/> [20.10.2025].

<sup>69</sup> I. Tarrós, Z. Vörös, *Hungary's global opening to an interpolar world*, "Politeja" 2014, vol. 2, no. 28.

<sup>70</sup> On 8 September 2025, V. Orbán asserted that, unless the EU undergoes fundamental re-organisation, it could cease to exist within the next ten years. V. Orbán, *Facebook post*, Facebook, 8 September 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/orbanviktor/posts/1339966944167567> [15.10.2025].

<sup>71</sup> Orbán Viktor: *Amerika nem gyengül, Kína erősödik, Európa pedig szenved*, Index.hu, 7 July 2022, <https://index.hu/belfold/2022/07/07/orban-viktor-miniszterelnok-gazdasag-valsag-inflacio-ipari-termes-foglalkoztatottsag/> [15.10.2025].

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 143. The argument of Hungary's limited significance, stemming from its constrained capacities (including financial), as a determinant of its foreign policy, was also raised in the interviews: HUFP/2023/8/27/2, HUFP/2023/9/1/4/, HUFP/2023/9/12/7, HUFP/2023/9/15/9. One of the experts even proposed the hypothesis that, as a small state with limited capacity to influence Western policy, Hungary sought to position itself in opposition to the Western mainstream policy towards Russia, seeing this as the only way to gain leverage and simply "be noticed". At the same time, the expert contended that this policy has not produced the intended results: HUFP/2023/9/12/7.

<sup>73</sup> I. Tarrós, Z. Vörös, op. cit.

Fidesz is a typical leader-centric party, and its centralised and hierarchical nature is reflected in the governance of the state<sup>74</sup>. Understanding Hungary's foreign policy, therefore, requires attention to the diagnoses and assessments articulated quite openly by Viktor Orbán in response to shifts in the international environment. V. Orbán identifies two principal vectors: first, the process of multipolarisation generates great-power competition, which carries the risk of hegemonic wars, of which the war in Ukraine is considered an illustration<sup>75</sup>. Second, he observes a decline in the influence of liberalism alongside a rise in conservative tendencies, and, although not articulated explicitly by V. Orbán, presumably also authoritarian tendencies. He also seeks to cultivate personal relationships with leaders who are similarly charismatic and "illiberal", such as Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Vladimir Putin.

These assumptions underpin the operationalisation of strategy, according to which Hungary, shaped by historical experience, must not allow itself to be drawn into armed conflict, while simultaneously cultivating relations with conservative regimes and politicians<sup>76</sup>. In this context, Orbán has stated openly that he will not allow Hungary to be turned against Germany, Russia, or Turkey, regarded as regional powers<sup>77</sup>. Hungary's policy towards Russia is premised on the notion that Russia is too strong to be defeated militarily, but at the same time too weak to contemplate a credible attack on NATO<sup>78</sup>. Experts have also hypothesised that Orbán expects that the West

<sup>74</sup> HUFP/2023/9/26/13.

<sup>75</sup> In October 2024, the proportion of Hungarians who believed that Russia's aggression was undertaken for defensive purposes had risen to 22%, while as many as 12% of the population were uncertain who to blame for the outbreak of the war. Supporters of the view that the Russian war is defensive are generally aligned with Fidesz. Az Index birtokába jutott a kutatás, amely megmutatja, mit gondolnak a magyarok a háborúról, Index.hu, 17 October 2024, <https://index.hu/belfold/2024/10/17/kozvelemeny-kutatas-zavecz-research-habuру-оросзаг-украина-хонведseg-nato-europai-unio> [10.09.2025].

<sup>76</sup> J. Bornio, *Co przemówienie Viktora Orbána w Băile Tușnad mówi o polityce zagranicznej Węgier*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2024, no. 141, [https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/kies-1166/\[18.09.2025\]](https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/kies-1166/[18.09.2025]).

<sup>77</sup> Orbán Viktor beszéde a miniszterelnöki eskiüttetélet követően, Miniszterelnöki Kabinetiroda, 12 May 2018, <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedepek-publikacioiok-interjuk/orban-viktor-beszede-a-miniszterelnoki-eskutetel-kovetoen> [15.10.2025]; Hungary also maintains strong economic ties with these countries.

<sup>78</sup> This narrative put forward by V. Orbán presents a rather simplified view of international relations, in which Russia would need to provoke a conventional confrontation with NATO in order to undermine the Alliance's security guarantees. In reality, however, these

will, sooner or later, need to establish a working relationship with Russia, and that Hungary may be rewarded for its loyalty during a period of Western ostracism<sup>79</sup>. V. Orbán's reluctance to confront Russia is further justified by the belief that the West has not genuinely invested in a Ukrainian victory, as it does not subsidise Ukraine in the capabilities that might make such a victory feasible<sup>80</sup>. In accordance with this diagnosis, Hungary's pursuit of a multi-vector policy, maintaining an equidistant stance between various parties to the conflict, is intended to position the country as a beneficiary of the multipolarisation of the global order<sup>81</sup>.

## **6. Hungarian minorities abroad**

Hungary's foreign policy towards its neighbouring states is also significantly influenced by the Hungarian minority residing in these countries, estimated at around 1,800,000<sup>82</sup> individuals. This factor is closely intertwined with historical policy, the legacy of the so-called "Trianon trauma", demographic considerations<sup>83</sup>, and domestic politics in Hungary. Minorities may also serve as instruments of pressure on neighbouring states and, as such, perform a functional role within Hungary's foreign policy.

The Hungarian government's policy towards the diaspora outside its borders was energised following the victory of the Fidesz-KDNP coalition in the 2010 parliamentary elections, encompassing measures such as social

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guarantees can also be destabilised through hybrid means. It is, therefore, difficult to determine whether some of V. Orbán's statements stem from a misunderstanding of Russia's nature, or whether certain issues are being instrumentalised and deliberately overinterpreted.

<sup>79</sup> HUFP/2023/8/29/3, HUFP/2023/9/27/14.

<sup>80</sup> HUFP/2023/10/19/17.

<sup>81</sup> This hypothesis is corroborated by one of the respondents: HUFP/2023/8/29/3.

<sup>82</sup> The cumulative data from national censuses indicate the Hungarian minority populations as follows: Romania (2021 – 1,002,151), Slovakia (2021 – 422,065), Serbia (2022 – 184,442), Ukraine (2001 – 156,600), Austria (2022 – 94,411; data not derived from a census and referring to Hungarian citizens residing in Austria rather than a minority population; source: T. Thomas, *Migration & Integration 2022: Statistisches Jahrbuch – Hauptergebnisse*, Wien 2022, [https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/435/Praesentation\\_Statistik\\_Austria\\_Integrationsjahrbuch\\_2022\\_25.07.2022.pdf](https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/435/Praesentation_Statistik_Austria_Integrationsjahrbuch_2022_25.07.2022.pdf) [19.09.2025]), Croatia (2021 – 10,315), and Slovenia (2002 – 6,243).

<sup>83</sup> Due to the challenging process of Magyarisation among migrants, the Hungarian diaspora has become a valuable demographic resource.

support and the granting of voting rights<sup>84</sup>. Unsurprisingly, this translated into electoral benefits<sup>85</sup>, with the Hungarian diaspora becoming an almost guaranteed Fidesz electorate. One of the principal objectives of Hungary's policy towards the diaspora is to prevent discrimination or any actions by the host states that could be perceived by the Hungarian government or the diaspora itself as detrimental. From Hungary's perspective, any failure to respond to such potential actions by individual neighbouring states risks reciprocal measures against Hungarian diasporas elsewhere<sup>86</sup>.

Hungarian–Ukrainian relations are burdened by disputes concerning the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia. From the Hungarian perspective, key points of contention include: the controversial education law that began to be processed in 2017; various forms of autonomy; and the use of Hungarian symbols in the public sphere. From the Ukrainian perspective, the issues include dual citizenship, transparency in diaspora funding, and alleged interference in Ukrainian elections<sup>87</sup>. For Hungary, ensuring the rights of its diaspora in Ukraine constitutes a red line in its policy towards that country. This is reflected particularly in Hungary's consistent vetoes of EU–Ukraine accession talks. At the end of 2023, Ukraine – partly under pressure from the EU – made certain concessions regarding language policy, a precondition that, combined with other factors, paved the way for Viktor Orbán's first visit to Ukraine since the outbreak of the full-scale war<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> D. Héjj, *Węgierska diaspora i polityka narodowościowa jako element rywalizacji politycznej na Węgrzech*, [in:] H. Chałupczak et al. (eds.), *Polityka migracyjna w obliczu współczesnych wyzwań*, Lublin 2018.

<sup>85</sup> In 2004, Fidesz endeavoured to secure the rights of Hungarian diasporas through a national referendum. Although the proposal ultimately failed – despite the significant support from the Socialist Party – the initiative nevertheless enabled Fidesz to garner a measure of support among Hungarian minorities abroad at an early stage.

<sup>86</sup> HUFP/2023/9/1/4. Other experts also identified minority-related issues as one of the key determinants of Hungary's policy towards Ukraine: HUFP/2023/9/15/9, HUFP/2023/9/26/12, HUFP/2023/10/2/15.

<sup>87</sup> P. Balogh, K. Kovály, *Small but Salient: The Securitisation of Ukraine's Ethnic Hungarian Minority*, "Nationalities Papers" 2025, vol. 53, no. 4; D. Tuzhanskyi, *How Ukraine must develop its minority policy to avoid the 'ethnic trap' during EU accession negotiations, and how international partners could help*, Globsec, 2023, <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/how-ukraine-must-develop-its-minority-policy-avoid-ethnic-trap-during-eu> [19.09.2025].

<sup>88</sup> J. Bornio, A. Poznar, *Hungarian Prime Minister's first visit to Kyiv since the outbreak of war*, "IEŚ Commentaries" 2024, no. 134, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/kies-1159-en/> [19.09.2025].

## 7. Energy policy

A decisive factor shaping Hungary's policy towards Russia – and, by extension, towards the EU's sanctions regime – is the country's high level of dependency in the energy sector, both in terms of resource supply and in technological and investment dimensions<sup>89</sup>. Energy security and the protection of strategic interests related to stable supply are closely intertwined with domestic politics in Hungary, owing to the impact of gas prices on household financial stability and the adoption of a “German model”<sup>90</sup> of economic development. Subsidies for household gas consumption have had a significant electoral impact for Fidesz, particularly in a context where a substantial portion of Hungarian society relies on current income<sup>91,92</sup>.

In contrast to most EU member states, which, following the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, began to divest from Russian hydrocarbons, Hungary continued its cooperation with Russia in this domain<sup>93</sup>. As of 2023, Hungary still imported approximately 78% of its oil<sup>94</sup> and 81% of its gas<sup>95</sup> from Russia, a share that has continued to rise through 2024 and 2025.

<sup>89</sup> D. Héjj, M. Paszkowski, *Consistent increase in Hungary's energy dependence on Russia*, “IEŚ Commentaries” 2021, no. 152, <https://ies.lublin.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ies-commentaries-455-152-2021.pdf> [19.09.2025].

<sup>90</sup> That is to say, the utilisation of inexpensive raw materials is conducive to the economic development of a given country.

<sup>91</sup> HUFP/2023/8/27/2. Two experts even suggested in this context that V. Orbán is a continuator of János Kádár's policy, concluding that “Hungarian society only needs to be fed to prevent rebellion”: HUFP/2023/9/1/4, HUFP/2023/9/18/10. A similar point was noted in: D. Héjj, *Węgry na nowo*, op. cit.

<sup>92</sup> Approximately 38% of Hungarians possess no personal savings, while merely 27% engage in regular saving practices. *Egyáltalán nincs megtakarítása a magyarok 40 százalékának – kutatás*, 24.hu, 9 December 2024, <https://24.hu/fn/gazdasag/2024/12/09/lakossag-megtaritas-cib-bank-vasarlas-felretett-penz-felmeres-havi-bevetel-kereset/> [15.10.2025].

<sup>93</sup> C. Weiner, *Natural gas in Hungary before and after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine*, [in:] R. Friedery, C. Weiner, B. Szentgáli-Tóth (eds.), *Refugees, resources, security, and beyond: Legal and broader impacts of the war in Ukraine on Hungary and Poland*, Budapest 2025.

<sup>94</sup> *Hungary Petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous imports by country in 2023*, WITS, 2023, <https://wits.worldbank.org/trade/comtrade/en/country/HUN/year/2023/tradeflow/Imports/partner/ALL/product/270900> [19.10.2025].

<sup>95</sup> *Hungary Natural gas in gaseous states imports by country in 2023*, WITS, 2023, <https://wits.worldbank.org/trade/comtrade/en/country/HUN/year/2023/tradeflow/Imports/partner/ALL/product/271121> [19.10.2025].

In the case of oil, the import rate rose to a striking 87.5%<sup>96</sup>, while Hungary's natural gas imports from Russia in 2025 reached unprecedented levels, exceeding the country's domestic demand by approximately two billion cubic metres<sup>97</sup>. Together, these two energy sources account for 61% of Hungary's overall energy mix<sup>98</sup>.

The Hungarian government's principal arguments focused on the high degree of dependency on Russian supplies, the relatively lower cost of the resource<sup>99</sup>, the lack of alternative infrastructure, and Hungary's landlocked nature<sup>100</sup>. At the same time, Hungary made only minimal efforts to diversify away from Russian energy<sup>101</sup>, adopting a policy of "strategic waiting", likely in the hope of a shift in Western policy towards Russia.

The alleged pricing parity of Russian resources, and their consequent preference by the Hungarian government, as well as the particular characteristics of Russian crude – enabling relatively higher production of diesel fuel – were repeatedly emphasised by interviewed experts<sup>102</sup>. Oil supply issues are not solely a matter of energy security but also affect the financial stability of

<sup>96</sup> *Megszavazta az Országgyűlés: Brüsszel kedvéért nem döntjük romba a magyar gazdaságot – az energiabiztonság az első*, vg.hu, 29 September 2025, <https://www.vg.hu/vilaggazdasag-magyar-gazdasag/2025/09/orosz-energia-levalas-orszaggyules-dontes> [18.10.2025].

<sup>97</sup> However, the majority of the surplus is directed to Slovakia. *Soha nem történt még olyan a Magyarországra érkező orosz gázzal, mint most: majdnem szétdurran a Török Áramlat*, vg.hu, 15 October 2025, <https://www.vg.hu/vilaggazdasag-magyar-gazdasag/2025/10/orosz-gazimport-rekord-szijarto-torok-aramlat-magyar> [18.10.2025].

<sup>98</sup> *Hungary, Energy Mix*, IEA.org, <https://www.iea.org/countries/hungary/energy-mix> [18.10.2025].

<sup>99</sup> It is difficult to ascertain whether the price of Russian hydrocarbons is genuinely lower, given that the majority of contracts are of a confidential nature.

<sup>100</sup> E. Thorburn, *Beyond 'Russia-Friendly' Hungary's Foreign Policy Rationales*, FOI Memo, Northern European and Transatlantic Security, 2024, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI%20Memo%208659> [19.09.2025]. Also see the interview with Attila Steiner, Hungary's State Secretary for Energy and Climate Policy: *Steiner Attila: Orosz import nélkül évi ezerhatszáz milliárd forintba kerülne a rezsicsökkentés*, vg.hu, 26 June 2025, [https://www.vg.hu/vilaggazdasag-magyar-gazdasag/2025/06/rezsicsokkentes-steiner-orosz-gaz#googleg\\_vignette](https://www.vg.hu/vilaggazdasag-magyar-gazdasag/2025/06/rezsicsokkentes-steiner-orosz-gaz#googleg_vignette) [16.10.2025].

<sup>101</sup> M. Paszkowski, *Węgry wobec importu rosyjskiego gazu ziemnego i południowych szlaków dostaw*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2025, no. 175, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/wegry-wobec-importu-rosyjskiego-gazu-ziemnego-i-południowych-szlakow-dostaw/> [19.09.2025]; M. Paszkowski, *Węgry: poszukiwanie równowagi w dostawach gazu ziemnego*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2023, no. 35, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/wegry-poszukiwanie-rownowagi-w-dostawach-gazu-ziemnego/> [19.09.2025].

<sup>102</sup> HUFP/2023/8/27/2, HUFP/2023/9/1/4, HUFP/2023/9/11/5, HUFP/2023/9/12/7, HUFP/2023/9/18/10, HUFP/2023/92/6/12.

Hungary's state-owned oil and gas company MOL. MOL operates refineries in Slovakia via its subsidiary Slovnaft, where production likewise depends on Russian crude. According to one expert interviewed, MOL's revenues significantly subsidise the state budget and contribute to its stability<sup>103</sup>.

Hungary's energy ties with Russia also encompass the expansion of its only nuclear power plant in Paks, originally constructed using Soviet technology. In 2014, a Hungarian-Russian agreement was signed to build a second reactor (Paks-II); however, the project encountered significant obstacles due to Western sanctions. Despite the full-scale invasion, the Hungarian government remained determined to continue cooperation with Rosatom<sup>104</sup>, citing relatively lower costs for both expansion and operation of the plant.

These energy interconnections naturally drove Hungary towards closer cooperation with Russia and a reluctance to endorse the EU's sanctions regime. While Hungary occasionally blocked<sup>105</sup> certain sanction packages, sometimes resulting in their easing, and has been a prominent advocate for excluding hydrocarbon trade and financial institutions from the sanctions framework<sup>106</sup>, it is important to note that Hungary did not block any packages entirely. Energy dependency renders Russia a critical partner in Hungary's foreign and security policy, substantially constraining the country's freedom of manoeuvre in shaping policy towards Moscow. Nevertheless, Hungary's policy is not solely a product of dependency; it also reflects the explicit intention of the V. Orbán government to maintain energy cooperation with Russia.

## **8. Domestic politics**

Although it may seem a truism that a state's foreign and domestic policies are mutually interdependent, a significant number of respondents emphasised

<sup>103</sup> HUFP/2023/9/18/10.

<sup>104</sup> I. Gizińska, *Hungarian-Russian Paks nuclear project: A new breach in Western sanctions*, Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), 14 July 2025, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-07-14/hungarian-russian-paks-nuclear-project-a-new-breach-western> [22.09.2025].

<sup>105</sup> In other instances, it merely threatens to exercise a veto prior to the vote.

<sup>106</sup> A particularly illustrative example is the eighteenth sanctions package: *Hungary and Slovakia set to block EU's fresh Russia sanction package*, EuroNews, 23 June 2025, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/06/23/hungary-and-slovakia-set-to-block-eus-fresh-russia-sanction-package> [17.10.2025].

that, in the context of Hungary's foreign policy concerning the war in Ukraine, foreign policy functions primarily as an extension of domestic politics, serving above all to consolidate social support and reinforce the political system<sup>107</sup>.

A recurrent theme in explanations of Hungary's ambiguous stance towards Ukraine is the antagonisation of Ukraine through the lens of securitisation theory. Several respondents explicitly stated that Fidesz builds domestic legitimacy by identifying external and internal enemies and presenting itself as the sole force capable of protecting Hungary from the threats they pose<sup>108</sup>. In the Hungarian context, such antagonists include migrants, the European Union, George Soros, the political opposition, the liberal establishment, Ukraine, and Zelensky himself<sup>109</sup>. It is noteworthy that these narratives often overlap, forming a coherent discursive framework. In the context of the war in Ukraine, this manifests, for example, in a narrative portraying EU institutions and opposition leaders as actors pushing both the EU and Hungary towards war<sup>110</sup>.

A separate case illustrating the interplay between domestic and foreign policy is Hungary's opposition to Sweden's accession to NATO<sup>111</sup>, which was interpreted by nearly all experts interviewed as being driven primarily by domestic political considerations. The notion that Budapest used the accession issue as a bargaining tool in negotiations over defence contracts – including the leasing of Saab JAS 39 Gripen aircraft – was mentioned only once<sup>112</sup>. Much more frequently, Hungary's position was explained as an attempt to project the image of a strong and assertive government and as a retaliatory response

<sup>107</sup> HUFP/2023/8/24/1, HUFP/2023/8/27/2, HUFP/2023/8/29/3, HUFP/2023/9/1/4, HUFP/2023/9/11/5, HUFP/2023/9/15/9, HUFP/2023/9/18/10, HUFP/2023/9/26/12, HUFP/2023/9/26/13.

<sup>108</sup> HUFP/2023/8/24/1, HUFP/2023/9/1/4, HUFP/2023/9/15/9, HUFP/2023/9/26/13.

<sup>109</sup> These individuals have been the principal figures in Fidesz's billboard campaigns. B. Bálint, *Itt az új plakátkampány: Zelenszkij szigorúan néz, von der Leyen önelégülten mosolyog, Weber pedig ördögien nevet*, 444.hu, <https://444.hu/2025/04/06/itt-az-uj-plakatkampa-ny-zelenszkij-szigoruan-nez-von-der-leyen-onelegulten-mosolyog-weber-pedig-ordog-ien-nevet> [17.10.2025]; Soros-plakát, hvg.hu, <https://hvg.hu/cimke/Soros-plak%C3%A1t> [17.10.2025].

<sup>110</sup> HUFP/2023/2023/9/15/9.

<sup>111</sup> More in: J. Bornio, D. Szacawa, *Szwecja w NATO: ostatni etap negocjacji*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2024, no. 48, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/kies-1073/> [22.09.2025].

<sup>112</sup> HUFP/2023/9/11/6. Even though military contracts were, after all, part of the bilateral negotiations between Hungary and Sweden. J. Bornio, D. Szacawa, op. cit.

to Sweden's earlier involvement in criticising the rule of law in Hungary – in some accounts even perceived as a personal vendetta of V. Orbán<sup>113</sup>.

Another important dimension of Hungary's domestic politics is the Orbán regime's effort to construct a “loyal upper class”, entrenched in key sectors of the economy such as defence, energy, banking, media, and discount stores<sup>114</sup>. Several of these endeavours are pursued in cooperation with Russia<sup>115</sup>.

Experts also noted that the so-called “peace narrative”, which antagonises Ukraine while relativising Russia's responsibility for the outbreak of the war<sup>116</sup>, was deliberately introduced by Fidesz politicians into the domestic political discourse in order to clearly distinguish themselves from the opposition, whose rhetoric has been largely pro-Ukrainian<sup>117</sup>.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of the collected empirical material allows for the formulation of several general conclusions concerning Hungary's foreign policy towards the Russo-Ukrainian war and related issues, as well as the addressing of the research questions outlined in the introductory section. Hungarian policy in this domain is governed by a variety of particularisms manifesting across multiple dimensions. These particularisms are linked both to domestic and international politics, to specific substantive dimensions of policy, and are

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<sup>113</sup> HUFP/2023/8/27/2, HUFP/2023/9/26/12, HUFP/2023/9/26/13, HUFP/2023/10/19/17.

<sup>114</sup> HUFP/2023/8/24/1, HUFP/2023/8/27/2, HUFP/2023/8/29/3, HUFP/2023/9/12/7, HUFP/2023/9/18/10.

<sup>115</sup> Experts pointed, for example, to the presence of OTP Bank in the Russian market, the collaboration of MOL with the Russian energy and banking sectors (HUFP/2023/9/18/10), and the connections of the Minister of Defence, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, with the Russian company Metrowagonmash (HUFP/2023/8/29/3). Further information on K. Szalay-Bobrovniczky's connections with Russian business can be found in: *The Russians are poised to benefit from international deal financed by Hungary*, Direkt36.hu, 29 October 2019, <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/egyre-kedvezobb-az-oroszoknak-a-kormany-altal-tam-ogatott-egyiptomi-gigauzlet-amibol-egy-magyar-ceget-furtak-ki/> [9.09.2025]. Minister Bobrovniczky was also a shareholder in the Czech defence company Aero Vodochody, holding an 80% ownership stake.

<sup>116</sup> See more M.B. Göransson, *The Hungarian government's rhetoric on Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine and its articulation of a Hungarian security identity*, “European Security” 2025.

<sup>117</sup> HUFP/2023/9/26/13, HUFP/2023/10/10/16.

dictated by objective as well as subjective factors. These dimensions are not isolated realities but are rather interrelated and mutually permeating.

Hungary's geographical and geopolitical position provides the country with strategic depth and minimises its perception of threat from Russia. This, in turn, allows for greater freedom in its relations with Moscow and flexibility in participating in NATO's deterrence policy and in providing support to Ukraine. Historical experience – through its skilful instrumentalisation – facilitates the Hungarian government's construction of a narrative surrounding the war and Hungary's role within it. The principal components of this narrative include the remembrance of great national defeats and the perceived necessity of keeping Hungary detached from hegemonic conflicts.

A significant determinant of Hungary's foreign policy is Viktor Orbán's anticipation of the emerging international order. From this stems the perceived necessity of adapting to new multipolarity, primarily through engagement with rising powers and conservative movements, hedging in the face of risks associated with great-power competition, and the conviction that Russia cannot be defeated.

An important element of Hungary's foreign policy towards its neighbouring states continues to be the presence of Hungarian minorities residing within them. In the context of relations with Ukraine, these minorities have become hostages to the broader bilateral relationship. From Hungary's perspective, this issue is closely related to demographic concerns and domestic politics – particularly since these minorities were granted the right to participate in Hungarian elections.

Another factor shaping the dynamics of Hungary's relations with Russia – which also translates into other directions of its foreign policy – is energy cooperation, particularly in the import of hydrocarbons and nuclear investment projects. Energy linkages render Russia an integral component of Hungary's economic development model. In this context, Hungary not only pursues a strategy of deliberate waiting until the Western sanctions regime is liberalised but also deepens its dependence on Russia.

Domestic factors remain a crucial dimension of the analysis of Hungary's foreign policy. In the Hungarian case, foreign policy has become a function of domestic politics – chiefly in terms of building public support and consolidating political power. Due to these internal determinants, it will be difficult for the Fidesz government to withdraw from its established approach

to foreign affairs. At the current stage, however, the government shows no inclination to revise any of the existing directions of its foreign policy.

The authors, expressing their gratitude to the anonymous reviewers whose valuable comments contributed to enhancing the scholarly quality of this article, invite other researchers to pursue further studies on the subject matter, fully aware that each of the dimensions addressed herein merits deeper exploration and further academic analysis.

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