

Hungary elections: US Vice President Vance throws his weight behind Orbán

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Just a few days before the parliamentary elections in Hungary on April 12, U.S. Vice President JD Vance demonstratively travelled to Budapest to openly support Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's campaign. The visit represents a direct intervention by the Trump administration in the Hungarian election campaign and underscores the strategic importance Washington attaches to the outcome of the vote. Already in February, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio had travelled to Budapest and backed the incumbent government.

In a characteristically provocative manner, Vance denounced the support of leading EU powers for opposition candidate Péter Magyar as “interference” in the Hungarian election—only to do exactly that himself in the next breath and throw the full political weight of the United States behind Orbán.

At Orbán's official residence, the former Carmelite monastery high above Castle Hill, the two appeared together before the press. Vance declared unambiguously: “Relations with Hungary are very important to us, but Viktor Orbán will win this election. That is our plan!” In the afternoon, the interference went even further. At a campaign event of Orbán's Fidesz party, Vance patched in U.S. President Donald Trump live: “I love Hungary, I love Viktor, he is a great man and has achieved so much,” Trump declared—campaign support over loudspeaker.

On Wednesday, Vance praised Orbán in another speech as an alleged man of peace, claiming that European capitals had “not done nearly as much for peace between Russia and Ukraine as Viktor Orbán.”

This portrayal is as cynical as it is dishonest. Shortly before Vance's arrival in Budapest, Trump had threatened Iran with the destruction of “an entire civilization.” Vance himself made clear that the two-week ceasefire announced by Washington has nothing to do with a turn toward peace. Rather, it merely gives US imperialism, under conditions of deep crisis and explosive social tensions, a breather to regroup and prepare further military escalations. In a threatening tone, Vance declared that if Iran “lies” or “cheats,” he “will not be happy.”

The open support for Orbán has several reasons. On the one hand, the Hungarian prime minister is a close ideological ally and role model for the fascistic course of the Trump administration. Orbán stands for an aggressive policy of sealing off the country against migrants and for the establishment of an authoritarian state in which the media, judiciary and large parts of the state apparatus have been systematically brought under control. Part of this reactionary offensive is also the open rehabilitation of the Horthy dictatorship, which collaborated with Nazi Germany during World War II.

On the other hand, Washington views Orbán as an important lever to weaken the European Union and subordinate the continent more

closely to US imperialism. Orbán has repeatedly blocked European initiatives, particularly financial aid and military support for Ukraine. The leading EU powers—above all Germany—fear nothing more than that Washington might independently strike a deal with Moscow that would undermine their geostrategic and economic interests in Ukraine and vis-à-vis Russia.

Against this backdrop, the Hungarian parliamentary elections are also becoming a confrontation between Washington and the EU. And for the first time after 16 years of uninterrupted rule by Orbán, a possible change of power is emerging.

According to polls, the opposition party Tisza, under its lead candidate Magyar, could expand its lead and reach the majority of the vote, while Orbán's Fidesz is at only about 28 percent.

Besides Fidesz and Tisza, only a few smaller parties are running, whose entry into parliament is uncertain. Numerous parties—including nominally left-wing and liberal forces—are foregoing their own candidacies and are openly or indirectly calling for a vote for Tisza.

In European media, Magyar is portrayed as a democratic counterweight to the authoritarian Orbán, and the election is stylized as a “final battle for democracy.” A closer examination, however, shows that this depiction has nothing to do with reality.

What does Magyar represent?

Tisza was founded in Eger in 2021 by wealthy businessmen Attila Szabó and Boldizsár Deák as a right-wing party. The party did not run in the elections a year later and remained largely inactive until 2024.

Magyar himself comes from the inner circle of Fidesz. He worked in the Foreign Ministry, where he was also responsible for the Orbán government's relations with the European Parliament, and sat on several supervisory boards of state-owned companies. After internal disputes, he released secret recordings of conversations with his ex-wife, then Fidesz Justice Minister Judit Varga, in which she described how the government had manipulated corruption investigations. Varga and the then President Katalin Novák were subsequently forced to resign.

Magyar used this scandal, which coincided with growing discontent with the Orbán government, to call mass demonstrations against the government. At the same time, he took over the Tisza party and used it to run in the 2024 EU election. Due to opposition to Orbán and the complete lack of a genuine opposition in the political spectrum, the party immediately achieved nearly 30 percent, while Fidesz lost

significant support.

Politically, Magyar and Tisza are just as right-wing as Orbán and Fidesz. On social and economic policy, Magyar advocates the same strict austerity course that Orbán has implemented. He has also not distanced himself from Orbán's refugee and migration policies. The party's core personnel are largely recruited from former Fidesz members.

In contrast to Orbán, however, Magyar advocates support for Ukraine, a tougher stance against Russia, and a "normalization" of relations with the EU. Frozen EU funds are also expected to flow back to Hungary after a change of government.

He draws support from relatively affluent middle-class layers in cities like Budapest, who hope to benefit from improved relations with the EU. He is also gaining votes among younger layers, some of whom have known nothing other than Orbán's government.

At the same time, he appeals to far-right circles with openly anti-Russian chauvinism. At his public events, he stokes anti-communist agitation against alleged Russian agents in the country, shouting to the crowd: "Comrades, it is over!" Sections of the audience respond in chants: "Russians go home!"

The nominations known so far for his shadow cabinet are also telling. Anita Orbán (no relation to the prime minister) is considered set for the Foreign Ministry. A graduate of the Fletcher School in Boston, she belonged to the pro-American wing of Fidesz until her departure. She advocates rapid independence from Russian oil supplies and declared that under a new government, Hungary would no longer "throw a wrench into the works" of the EU.

The former commander-in-chief of the Hungarian armed forces, Romulusz Ruszin-Szendi, could also be given a post. He was dismissed from military service by the Orbán government over espionage allegations and promptly joined Tisza. He is regarded as a right-wing hardliner, a supporter of Ukraine, and well connected within NATO structures.

István Kapitány, a former top manager, could head the Ministry of Economy. The former Shell executive left Hungary after the political transition in 1990 and built a career abroad. Today he denounces corruption, excessive bureaucracy and any restriction on business interests.

Orbán's record

A possible electoral defeat for Orbán would not be surprising. His right-wing government is deeply unpopular. Even in the elections four years ago, it was only due to the complete bankruptcy of the opposition that Orbán was able to remain in power. He is responsible for countless social attacks and has built an authoritarian system of rule over the past 16 years, restricting democratic rights and bringing the press into line.

As already became evident at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the healthcare system is chronically underfunded. Adequate treatment is hardly possible without "informal payments." Wages have stagnated for years and are among the lowest in the EU. Poverty is widespread. Rural areas outside the major cities are particularly affected by the social crisis.

A report by Human Rights Watch at the beginning of the year shows that the poverty rate among the elderly has nearly tripled since 2018.

The number of people over 65 at risk of poverty rose from 6.3 percent to 16.1 percent between 2018 and 2023. According to the report, hundreds of thousands of pensioners must regularly choose between food, medicine and heating.

Inflation rose sharply in 2022 and 2023, and for many households, basic foodstuffs became almost unaffordable. In this situation, the government implemented an EU recommendation in 2022 through the so-called "Recovery and Resilience Plan," which led to significant pension cuts to ease the budget.

Official unemployment figures have recently risen to a ten-year high. Currently, 235,000 people are unemployed—the highest number since 2016. However, these figures present a distorted picture; the real number is likely significantly higher. More and more companies are laying off workers, and according to analysts, this will worsen due to the war in the Middle East and the associated price increases.

In light of the social crisis, Orbán's election campaign focuses almost exclusively on the war in Ukraine. Fidesz did not even publish an official election program. Knowing full well that the NATO war against Russia is extremely unpopular in Hungary as in the rest of Europe, he presents himself as an opponent of escalation.

In reality, Orbán has pursued a contradictory course since the beginning of the war. He supported EU sanctions but avoided open criticism of Russia and presented Hungary as a neutral force. Most recently, tensions escalated after Budapest blocked a €90 billion loan to Ukraine following allegations that Ukraine had halted the transport of Russian oil to Hungary.

This is the main reason why policymakers and media in the EU hope for a change of power in Budapest. In fact, representatives of German and European imperialism are not concerned—as is often claimed—about the erosion of democracy under Orbán. On the contrary, they support his inhumane policies against refugees and migrants and are themselves strengthening the state repressive apparatus as well as openly fascist forces in order to push through their rearmament and war policies against growing social opposition.

Significantly, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl (CDU), with regard to the elections in Hungary, once again called for the abolition of the unanimity principle in the EU. "In order to be an effective international actor, we should abolish the unanimity principle in EU foreign and security policy," he stated.

For the working class, this election offers no progressive alternative. Neither Orbán nor Magyar represents its interests. Both stand for militarism, social attacks and authoritarian forms of rule—albeit with different foreign policy orientations.

To halt the slide toward dictatorship and war, workers and youth must unite on the basis of an independent socialist perspective with their class brothers and sisters throughout Europe, Russia, the United States and worldwide. This requires the building of a Hungarian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which defends Marxism against Stalinism and has warned from the outset of the reactionary consequences of the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.



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