

The Future of Ukrainian-Hungarian Relations Under a Renewed Fidesz Supermajority



**Author: Dmytro Tuzhanskyi,
Director, Institute for Central
European Strategy**

Context

Executive Summary

Chapter 1. The lowest point in modern history: UA-HU relations before Parliamentary elections in Hungary 2022

Chapter 2. Ukrainian topic in Hungarian elections 2022

Chapter 3. Five Reasons Why Hungary Supported Ukraine's EU Candidacy

Chapter 4. “Détente” and future scenarios of HU-UA relations

Conclusions as recommendations: What can be done to improve UA-HU relations and prevent further whirlpool of tension

This report has been prepared with support from IRI's Beacon Project. The opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of IRI



Executive Summary

Over the last five years, Hungarian-Ukrainian bilateral relations have been experiencing the deepest systemic crisis since the establishment of diplomatic in the early 1990s.

This crisis is built on a series of disputes that have remained unresolved, without decisions, for decades, with constructive dialogue under the aegis of dry neighborly diplomacy being recently replaced with constant tensions around very sensitive topics such as minority rights, Hungarian separatism, interference into internal affairs, double play in Russia's favor, etc.

Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine escalated this crisis, in particular because of appeasing politics of Viktor Orbán towards Russia and its ambitions in Europe.

During and after the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary campaign, which overlapped with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, bilateral relations between Kyiv and Budapest encountered yet another whirlpool of tension exchanging mutual insults and accusations. Additionally, Russia organized and conducted several hostile and false-flag operations stoking tensions between Ukraine and Hungary.

Thus, after the elections, the heavy baggage of previous bilateral problems was compounded by new ones. Personal accusations at the level of country leaders and MFA ministers, who are responsible for foreign affairs from both sides, weighed particularly heavily.

However, unexpected full Hungarian support of Ukraine's EU candidacy despite months of tensions has led to some sort of "détente", providing an opportunity for both sides to change the narratives and direction of relations.

In this report three main scenarios on how Ukrainian-Hungarian relations could develop in the short and middle term perspective are described and justified, as well as recommendations how these relations could be improved or at least prevented from further deteriorating.

The lowest point in the history of modern Ukraine-Hungarian relations history

As of the end 2021 and beginning 2022, on the eve of the official start of the parliamentary election campaign in Hungary, bilateral relations between Kyiv and Budapest were **at their lowest point** since the establishment of diplomatic relations in the early 1990s.

This low point was determined by the **deep systemic crisis of bilateral relations**, which publicly exploded in September 2017 with the adoption of the new Ukrainian education law marking the starting point.

The core of this systemic crisis of relations, which has lasted at least five years, is defined by three milestones that mutually reinforce and condition each other:

Milestone 1. Profound internal political changes, which happened almost simultaneously in both countries over last 10 years and were herald, to a greater or lesser extent, by the relaunch of nation and state building processes.

In Hungary, Fidesz, led by Viktor Orbán, returned to power in 2010 and began reconstructing the country on the principles of illiberal democracy and nation state with great attention to the protection of the rights of Hungarians abroad, particularly in neighboring countries¹.

¹ At that time, a new Constitution, laws on citizenship, etc. were adopted in Hungary <https://bit.ly/3AuK8P4>

During 2013-2014 Ukraine experienced even more profound internal changes - a change of political regime and deep social transformation as a result of the Revolution of Dignity followed by massive domestic structural and administrative reforms, Russian aggression in the East and South of the country that resulted in the full occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and parts of the eastern Donbas region, and dynamic movements towards joining the EU and NATO.

Thus, in both countries the question of the participation and place of ethnic Hungarians of Transcarpathia raised - on the one hand, as part of the Hungarian nation and nation state, and, at the same time, as part of the Ukrainian political nation.

Milestone #2. Until 2016-2017, Ukrainian-Hungarian diplomatic and political relations were largely stagnant: key interstate commissions were not held for seven years or more.² Consequently, when disputes over the new Ukrainian law on education arose, both parties lacked either the expertise or institutional capacity to settle tensions or transform them into constructive dialogue. Instead, a chain reaction occurred, where one conflict issue provoked the escalation of another - national minority rights, dual citizenship, autonomy claims, separatism, etc. Thus, a new agenda of UA-HU bilateral relations was formed consisting almost exclusively of mutual claims and conflicting sensitive issues.

Milestone #3. The influence of third parties on Ukrainian-Hungarian relations, primarily Russia. Since 2014, Russia has been actively exploiting the divisions and contradictions between Kyiv and Budapest in order to: 1) justify its aggression in Ukraine, drawing the parallel between its protection of Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine with Hungary's protect of ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia; 2) provoke an ethnic conflict or its appearance on the very borders of the EU and NATO in order to legitimize the Russian narrative about purported civil war in Ukraine, Ukrainian Nazis oppressing other ethnic groups, and so on; 3) undermine the unity of the EU and NATO in support of Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression and integration into these two entities. Russia acted and is still acting with firm methods - from disinformation to agents of influence in the power circles of Ukraine and Hungary.

On the other hand, the efforts of such players as Washington, Warsaw or Berlin, which could act as mediators between Kyiv and Budapest, were and remain unsystematic. The only exception are the efforts of Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell in 2017 – 2018.³

Therefore, UA-HU bilateral relations on the eve of the Hungarian elections 2022 had the following characteristics:

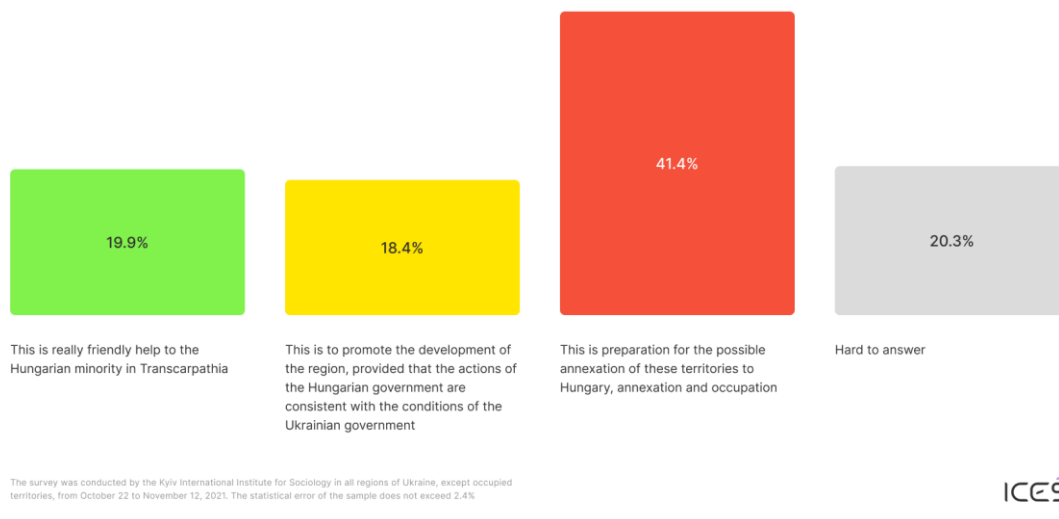
1. Focused exclusively on the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, where the Hungarian community lives compactly along the border with Hungary. Transcarpathia is the westernmost remote region often under addressed in the Ukrainian national agenda, but at the same time one that until 1920 (the Trianon Peace Treaty) was part of the Kingdom of Hungary and where, especially in the last 5-7 years, Budapest invested a lot of money under the guise of support to the Hungarian community. All this provokes fears of revisionism and separatism, similarly to South Slovakia, Transylvania in Romania.

² Before the meeting in June 2020, the Ukrainian-Hungarian Commission on Economic Cooperation last met in 2013, and the Commission on Ensuring the Rights of National Minorities last met in 2011.

³ The U.S. state official successfully moderated the first stage of Ukrainian-Hungarian dispute during 2018, when the Hungarian veto on the Ukraine-NATO summit was unblocked after series of negotiations <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2018/06/21/7083417>

According to a survey commissioned by the Institute for Central European Strategy and conducted nationwide (except the occupied territories) by the Democratic Initiative Foundation (DIF) in late 2021, 41.4% of Ukrainians think that Hungary's current policy towards the Hungarian minority residing in Zakarpattia - particularly with respect to financing schools, teachers, and grants for entrepreneurs - "aims at preparing a possible annexation and occupation of these territories to Hungary".

What do you think about Hungary's current policy towards the Hungarian national minority in Transcarpathia – funding schools, teachers, providing grants to entrepreneurs, etc.?



2. The current agenda of bilateral relations consists, first of all, of issues related to the Hungarian minority in Ukraine. In particular, Budapest demands from Kyiv to preserve the right to education for Hungarians in Ukraine entirely in the Hungarian language, from kindergarten through university inclusive, as well as legalization of dual citizenship, giving the Hungarian language the status of a regional language, and so on. In response, Kyiv demands from Budapest not to distribute Hungarian passports to Ukrainian citizens of Hungarian origin, to sign a special agreement that will regulate Hungarian government programs on investments, charity and technical support in Ukraine, in particular in Transcarpathia, etc. Thus, bilateral relations are highly politicized, conflictual, weakly discussed, and articulated in the form of mutual claims, not solutions with mutual interests.
3. At the same time, these relations look "empty" in terms of filling them with constructive issues that are mutually beneficial, such as the development of border infrastructure, railway and road connections, increasing trade, energy security capacities, etc.
4. Current Ukrainian-Hungarian relations are built on the legislative base of bilateral agreements of the early 1990s, which each side interprets in its own way, resulting in unilateral actions that provoke conflicts. For example, issuing Hungarian passports to citizens of Ukraine in conditions where multiple citizenship is prohibited by Ukrainian legislation. This inconsistency is reinforced by the actual paralysis of bilateral dialogue at the level of the intergovernmental commissions, which have not been working for years.
5. The Ukrainian-Hungarian tensions of the last 5 years went beyond bilateral debates and were brought to the level of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and NATO, in particular since the end of 2017 when Budapest began to veto the Ukraine-NATO Commission.
6. Over the five years of diplomatic confrontation, Kyiv and Budapest regularly exchanged harsh statements, mutually expelled consuls, and banned certain representatives of the official authorities to enter each other's countries,⁴ the offices of Hungarian Funds were searched, and a criminal case

⁴ Since autumn 2020, the state secretary for national policy, Árpád János Potápi, as well as the special envoy of the Hungarian government,

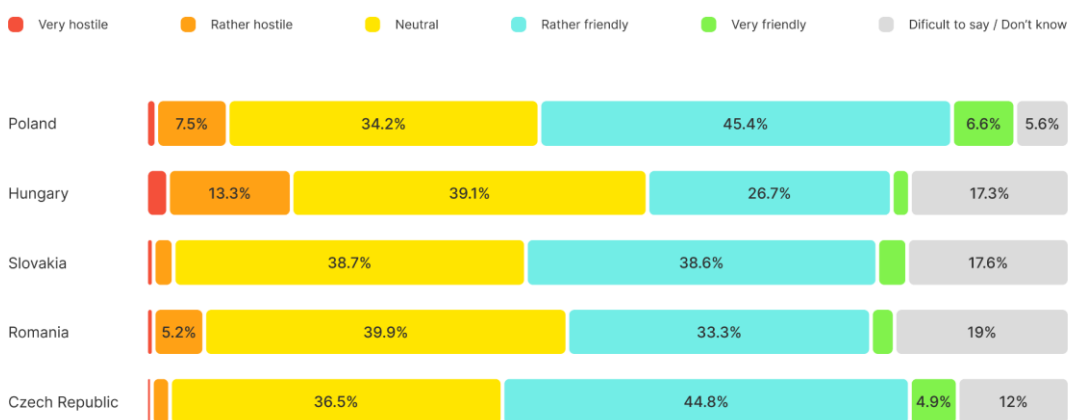
was launched against the leader of the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (KMKSZ) László Brenzovics, who fled to Hungary. Thus, relations became hostage to a series of scandals, personal conflicts led by politicians and security services rather than diplomats.

7. Between 2017 and 2020, several attempts were made to resolve the most critical issues but unfortunately failed, creating additional frustration, tension, fatigue, mistrust and toxicity in bilateral relations. The diplomatic conflict has become the new normal of bilateral relations and itself became the relationship. The tactics of symbolic gestures of reconciliation had only a temporary situational effect, provoking the high and unjustified expectations.
8. Ukraine and Hungary lack expertise and objective information about each other both at the level of politicians, experts and journalists, as well as public opinion. Both countries have a bad image inside the state: in Hungary, Ukraine is most often mentioned as a country of oppression of the Hungarian community, as well as an artificial state and a failed state; in Ukraine, Hungary is seen as a state that encroaches on Transcarpathia, is the main ally of Moscow and Putin, and is hostile to Ukraine, blocking its integration into NATO.

Thus, Ukraine and Hungary are in the grip of stereotypes and misinformation about each other, and the narratives of this disinformation, as well as misinformation, are very often shaped and promoted by Russia and pro-Russian forces in both countries. Moreover, both sides often use this disinformation, even of Russian origin, to discredit each other.

According to the aforementioned survey by DIF, except the occupied territories, 15.3% of Ukrainians believe that Hungary is hostile to Ukraine, of which 2 % - very hostile, and 13.3% - rather hostile. This is the worst results among all the countries that are Ukraine's immediate western neighbors from among the EU and NATO members.

In your opinion, how do the following countries treat Ukraine



The opinion poll was initiated by the Institute for Central European Strategy and conducted by the Democratic Initiative Foundation in cooperation with the Kyiv International Institute for Sociology in all regions of Ukraine, except temporarily occupied territories, from October 22 to November 12, 2021 using the CATI method. The statistical error of the sample does not exceed 2.4%.

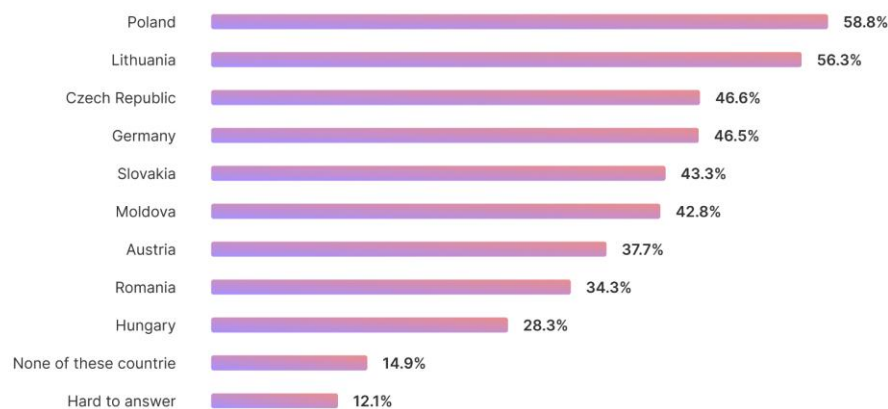


István Grezsa, are persona non grata in Ukraine for interference into Ukrainian elections and internal affairs. Since spring-summer around 10 representatives of Security Service of Ukraine, who were involved in the official investigation against the Egán Ede Fund (which is operating with Hungarian state programs and financing), and personally against its president and the leader of the KMKSZ (The Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association) László Brenzovics.

Moreover, according to the same poll, Ukrainians thought that Hungary supports Ukraine's integration to the EU weaker than many other countries among immediate neighbors.

In your opinion, which country (countries) from the list support Ukraine's accession to the European Union?

Multiple answers possible



The opinion poll was initiated by the Institute for Central European Strategy and conducted by the Democratic Initiative Foundation in cooperation with the Kyiv International Institute for Sociology in all regions of Ukraine, except temporarily occupied territories, from October 22 to November 12, 2021 using the CATI method. The statistical error of the sample does not exceed 2.4%



ICES

- Russia constantly interferes in Ukrainian-Hungarian relations both through disinformation and hostile special operations, and through loyal politicians. For example, one of the attacks on the KMKSZ office in Uzhhorod in 2018 was carried out by Polish right-wing radicals at the behest of German journalist Manuel Ochseneiter from Aleksandr Dugin's circle.⁵ In another case, in October 2017 the speaker of the Hungarian parliament László Kövér wrote letters to his Russian counterpart, Vyacheslav Volodin, with a proposal to jointly counter Ukrainian laws.⁶ Russian influence in Hungary has a special impact both among the extreme right⁷ and among Viktor Orbán's entourage in the context of his "Eastern opening" policy and the attraction of Russian investments since 2010⁸.
- Such Ukrainian-Hungarian relations have no value for Kyiv and Budapest per se, and therefore each side is ready to neglect, sacrifice and use them as a tool. Thus, both sides used, the Hungarian or Ukrainian card for internal mobilization. In addition, Orbán used the Ukrainian card to flirt with Moscow⁹ and Washington¹⁰.

To discover more about Ukrainian-Hungarian relations in the current stage, please read our two other reports:

- [Hungarian 2022 elections and the Hungarian national minority in Ukraine](#)
- Without campaign, with Russian disinformation and less than 6k votes: Hungarian elections 2022 in Ukrainian Zakarpattia**

Ukrainian topic in Hungarian elections 2022

⁵ <https://vsquare.org/german-politician-and-polish-nationalists-in-the-kremlins-service/>

⁶ <http://duma.gov.ru/news/47179/#slider-50203-50201>

⁷ https://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_lamEurasian.pdf

⁸ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/authoritarian-ties-case-russia-and-hungary>

⁹ <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/01/13/7105017/>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/us/politics/trump-ukraine-orban.html>

Despite the Ukrainian-Hungarian diplomatic tensions lasting since 2017, the "Ukrainian issue" did not become a top topic in Hungarian elections 2018 elections (and vice versa in Ukraine since that time). At that time, the ruling Fidesz-KDNP team exploited, first of all, the migration, Soros and the Brussels bureaucracy topics. The topic of Hungarians abroad was not so much secondary for Orbán's team as it was necessary for the general mobilization of the right-wing electorate inside Hungary¹¹.

Initially, this should also have been the case during the 2022 elections, when the key topics of the Fidesz-KDNP campaign were supposed to be socio-economic, LGBTQ+ and the protection of traditional family values. But the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine changed everything and Orbán's team made war the main topic¹².

It is important to stress, that the topic was very specifically and manipulatively formulated by Fidesz: not the protection of Hungarians in Ukraine, not Ukrainian-Hungarian relations, but the war in Ukraine without mentioning Russia as invader or aggressor.

Already during the election campaign, **in the context of Ukrainian-Hungarian relations, the issue of attitude towards Russia and assistance to Ukraine, in particular military, had become a priority and prevailed minority rights issues.**

Before the 3 April election day, the EU adopted four packages of sanctions targeting Russia, and Hungary supported them all. However, Viktor Orbán and his team said that they would not allow the transportation of weapons for Ukraine through the territory of Hungary, because it would seem to mean that "Hungary will be dragged into the war".

According to the 7 March decision of the Hungarian government, it is prohibited to transport weapons for Ukraine directly across the Ukrainian-Hungarian border. However, it is not prohibited to transport weapons through the territory of Hungary for later transfer, for example, to Slovakia or Romania within the framework of the European Peace Facility¹³. In addition, the transfer of non-lethal means directly across the Ukrainian-Hungarian border is not prohibited.

Just prior to election day, Volodymyr Zelenskyy twice appealed to Viktor Orbán, criticizing him for his support of Russia and for his reluctance to help Ukraine. The first appeal was made on 24 March at a meeting of the European Council¹⁴, and the second - on the night of 2-3 April,¹⁵ a few hours before the start of voting in Hungary.

Almost simultaneously, on 30 March, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Péter Szijjártó, accused Ukraine, in particular his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba, of interfering in the upcoming election¹⁶. On 1 April, the same narrative was repeated by Viktor Orbán with the statement: **“The left made a deal with the Ukrainians. If they win, the arms shipments will begin, the gas will be cut off, and the economy will be destroyed”**.

¹¹ <https://www.iribeaconproject.org/index.php/our-work-analysis-and-insights/2022-06-06/hungarian-two-step-fidesz-courts-ethnic-hungarians-abroad>

¹² <https://www.iribeaconproject.org/our-work-analysis-and-insights/2022-03-30/hungarian-elections-new-dynamics>

¹³ <https://bit.ly/3ldMWS0>

¹⁴ Speech <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C69yIPewd3E> . Around Viktor Orbán's reaction to Volodymyr Zelenskyy's first appeal, disinformation narrative spread online was noticed <https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-hungary-orban-idUSL1N2Y31OL>

¹⁵ https://youtu.be/s1XzJ3yg_Dg

¹⁶ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-business-europe-peter-szijjarto-3fb4684dc028688c3cd544ee661d7e43>



A baloldal lepaktált az ukránokkal. Ha nyernek, megindulnak a fegyverszállítmányok, elzárják a gázt, és tönkreteszik a gazdaságot.

Moreover, after voting ended, Viktor Orbán named the Ukrainian president among his “overpowered opponents” in this election¹⁷.

These are just main episodes of mutual political accusations during the electoral period in Hungary¹⁸. There were more of them like a whirlpool in the next few weeks during April, May and the beginning of June¹⁹.

After the elections bilateral relations sunk even lower: all the baggage of previous problems were compounded with new ones, for instance, **a) personal accusation in the level of state leaders and MFA ministers; b) direct high-level accusation of Hungary in supporting Russian aggression in Ukraine and Hungarian intentions to annex Ukrainian territory; c) very isolationist and appeasing position of Orbán’s government towards Russia with anti-sanction politics.**

It was hard to imagine that in such a bilateral reality Hungary would support the granting of candidacy status for Ukraine already in 2-3 weeks and without any doubts, pre-conditions and so on. But, following the Hungarian logic of things, Viktor Orbán did.

Five Reasons Why Hungary Supported Ukraine's EU Candidacy

First, Hungary supports Ukraine's EU accession, as it will enable it to solve its existential problem - to help Hungary to reunite its nation, a third of which found itself outside its native Hungary after the First World War and Trianon Treaty.

Today, this unification vision is based on the following political doctrine: if we cannot reunite the Hungarian nation within one state, we must strive to unite it within alliances such as the EU and

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/viktor-orban-adds-zelenskiy-to-his-list-of-overpowered-opponents>

¹⁸ <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/ilyen-volt-belulrol-az-ellenzeki-kampany-osszeomlasa/>

¹⁹ In the beginning of April Ukraine's ambassador to Hungary was summoned by Hungarian MFA over offensive comments from Kyiv regarding Budapest's stance on Russia's invasion. In May the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (NSDC) Oleksiy Danilov said that Hungary had been warned by Russia in advance about the attack on Ukraine and had intention to take away part of Ukraine's territory, alluding to Transcarpathia. There were tough debates during May around the 6th package of sanctions and Patriarch Kirill exclusion from the ban list. In the beginning of June, the speaker of the Hungarian parliament László Kövér described President Zelenskyy's style of demanding for support as “mental problem”. Predictably, the reaction of Ukraine side was massive and undiplomatic: for instance, Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Sybiha reminded about “fascist DNA” and Koriukivka massacre, when in 1943 6,700 residents of the Ukrainian village in Chernihiv region were killed by Hungarian Nazi soldiers. In return Péter Szijjártó backed László Kövér for his claim.

NATO so that there are no borders between Hungarians. That is why Hungary supported the accession not only of Ukraine but also of Serbia and was almost the primary advocate of Croatia at the time.

Manifestations of this national doctrine are the 'passportization' of Hungarians abroad, support programs, investments in Hungarian communities in neighboring countries, including Ukraine. This "excessive" interest and attention of Budapest to the Hungarian community in Ukraine played in Kyiv's favor this time.

Second: The candidacy conditions for Ukraine include a demand to change legislation on national minorities.

Third: Hungary does not want to have a common border with Russia.

Given the rapprochement between Budapest and Moscow over the last 12 years of Viktor Orbán's rule, this thesis may sound strange and suspicious. But in 2016, at a large meeting with Hungarian diplomats, the Hungarian prime minister personally emphasized that it is Hungarian strategic interest to have something between Hungary and Russia²⁰.

Like Slovakia or Romania, Hungary does not want to be the outer border of the European Union and bear all this burden of security, buffer zone, and provincialism.

In addition, Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU will let Budapest, like Bratislava, overcome the disproportion in the countries' development and resolve the issue of depression in eastern Hungary (the same applies to Slovakia). Each of these countries remembers and still feels the economic miracle effect of eastern Austria on western Hungary and Slovakia.

Fourth: After Germany, France, and Italy said "yes" to Ukraine, Hungary simply could not resist. This was not the case with the sixth package of sanctions when Budapest, looks like, voiced more than just its position.

Fifth: For Orbán, EU enlargement is his vision of the EU development as a union of nations, not federal states. The Hungarian Prime Minister favors the European Union developing horizontally, not vertically, i.e., by enlarging and adding new countries, and not by strengthening the vertical structure of the EU and changing decision-making mechanisms.

“Détente” and future scenarios of bilateral relations

This decision of Hungary to support Ukraine's candidacy status doesn't mean that Viktor Orbán became pro-Ukrainian, and stopped being pro-Russian, or that all previous bilateral misunderstandings and problems are forgotten and resolved. However, it does have a very strong impact on introducing a “détente” or “relaxation” in bilateral Ukrainian-Hungarian relations²¹, which escalated to a maximum after the Russian full-scale invasion.

²⁰ https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20160229_orban_kell_valami_magyarorszag_es_orszorszag_koze

²¹ Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked Viktor Orbán personally and invited to Ukraine via the phone call <https://twitter.com/ZelenskyyUa/status/1539215112640274433>



Moreover, the Hungarians decision on Ukraine's candidacy status for EU membership has created political the momentum for one more attempt to restart relations between Kyiv and Budapest.

There are few factors which shape this momentum, as well as determine scenarios for the development of the Ukrainian-Hungarian bilateral relations. And the key factor is "Russia" to the wide extend. But not the only one.

Unlike before the Russian invasion, when the key driver of Ukrainian-Hungarian relations were "ethnic issues," in the nearest future **the attitude towards Russia and its aggression in Europe, as well as support of Ukraine to resist will be the main and decisive driver.** Including support for anti-Russian sanctions, military aid to Ukraine, support for the Euro-Atlantic course as such and more distantly support for Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO.

There are few other important factors that influence the Hungarian modus vivendi towards Ukraine:

- Over the past 12 years, through the policy of close ties with Moscow, Viktor Orbán has integrated "pro-Russianness", and therefore "anti-Westernism" and "anti-Ukrainianism" into the Hungarian national interest;
- Despite the landslide victory in a row, Viktor Orbán won this mandate primarily on a platform of "peace", "appeasing Russia" and an anti-Western platform. To abandon it and change course radically is extremely risky / politically illogical even under the great pressure or with great will;
- Hungary's high dependence on Russian energy and investments in strategic sectors of the economy, as well as the high interest of Viktor Orbán's team in preserving these contracts, which is under threat in view of the West's policy towards Russia, of which Hungary is a part. This prompts Budapest to a new type of balancing act in foreign policy, including cooperation with those Western powers that favor an "immediate peace talk" and a returning to "business as usual" with Russia;
- Hungary is extremely vulnerable to the global economic and financial crisis caused by the Covid pandemic and the Russian invasion, which creates a critical need for cooperation with Western institutions, primarily the EU, to attract financial resources. A separate issue is the work of cooperation in the military sphere for the rearmament of the army, which is cooperation with NATO, Washington, Berlin and Paris;

- The crisis of Viktor Orbán's foreign policy, which was built not only on balancing between the West (EU, NATO) and the East (Russia, China), but also on the ambition to create and lead a new conservative "third way" in Europe, together, first of all, with the Polish PiS led by Jarosław Kaczyński, the Italian Lega Nord led by Matteo Salvini and others. The skepticism around these ambitions occurred even before the Russian invasion and intensified after, primarily due to the position of PiS and Poland in general regarding Ukraine, Russia and the future of the West. At the same time, Fidesz already burned bridges with the European People's Party,²² entered into conflict with the European Commission on pandemic recovery funding²³, the European Parliament and others, and now Budapest is showing clear interest in resuming cooperation;

From the Ukrainian side, the modus vivendi is practically without alternative, i.e.:

- In order to survive, Kyiv must get as close as possible to the West in all possible ways, from bilateral to multilateral cooperation in all spheres. Moreover, this cooperation will now and in the future increasingly take the form of a critical Ukraine's dependence from the West. Hungary, as Ukraine's immediate western neighbor, plays an important if not decisive role;
- Russia will remain an aggressor and an existential threat for Ukraine in the long term, and all those who cooperate with Russia are considered its allies and, accordingly, if not enemies, then a threat to Ukraine;

Therefore, taking into account all this and on the condition that the Russian-Ukrainian war will have in the short and medium term (until the end of the year) it is possible to distinguish three key scenarios for the development of Ukrainian-Hungarian relations:

First scenario: "Polish". As happened with complicated "historic issues" with Warsaw, Kyiv and Budapest will "forget" past disputes, in particular national minority topics, and restart relations on all levels - primarily political, diplomatic, economic, military - due to Hungary's unquestionable support for Ukrainian membership in the EU.

This scenario envisages full and public support for Ukraine, in particular the transfer (direct or not) of weapons to Ukraine and military support more broadly. Both sides resume dialogue at the highest level, leaving behind the relations crisis of the previous years. Dialogue on the rights of the Hungarian national minority moves from the political to the diplomatic and technocratic plane by means of the intergovernmental commission, which resumes its work after a decade-long hiatus.

Ukraine considers the possibility of adopting new legislation on national minorities, which would guarantee the Hungarian national minority in Ukraine the same rights that the Ukrainian national minority has in Hungary. This embodies the principle of reciprocity with regard to EU and NATO member states.

Hungary can use this reset with Kyiv as the pretext for its own political breakthrough with the EU on funds and Washington on weapons for rearmament of the Hungarian army, which is urgent.

Scenario probability: 1/10 - this is the least likely as it demands a radical change in Hungarian policy towards Russia and Russian aggression in Ukraine, and the return to the policies of the first Orbán government of 1998-2002.

²² Hungarian journalists recently detected the Orbán's efforts to rebuild cooperation with EPP
<https://telex.hu/belfold/2022/06/02/navracsics-tibor-a-kdnp-s-tagsagat-aktivalva-dolgozik-azon-hogy-a-fidesz-ujra-az-europai-neppart-tagja-legyen>

²³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-hopes-eu-recovery-fund-deal-by-end-2022-minister-2022-06-03/>

Second scenario: "Romanian". Hungary continues to support Ukraine in a non-public, exclusively humanitarian and non-military manner, following a somewhat isolationist conformist approach supporting the general line of the EU and NATO, without questioning it even in cases where it is at the expense of Hungary's national interests. This primarily concerns Russian sanctions. Simultaneously, in concert with the entire West, Hungary starts reorienting itself to a purposeful policy of reducing dependence on Russian energy sources and investments in the Hungarian economy, primarily energy, railway industry, etc. In practice this means the search for Russia's replacement in such projects as Paks II, Transmashholding Hungary Kft, the withdrawal from the International Investment bank project in Budapest along with five other members²⁴. Orbán's Hungary already did this once when the government prevented Russian Surgutneftegas from taking over MOL in 2009-2011. This coincided with the return of Fidesz to power, the strategy of returning Hungary's strategic assets to state ownership, and at the same time the beginning of Orbán's pro-Russian course.

Such a scenario of normalization of relations between Kyiv and Budapest could take place in parallel with the relaunch of Budapest's relations with the West, primarily Brussels, regarding the agreement on Hungary's post-Covid recovery plan and the use of European funds in general.

This scenario also assumes that Kyiv and Budapest continue to avoid sensitive issues, such as ethnic topic and "Hungarian pro-Russianness" and support a constructive dialogue on both issues between themselves and in multilateral formats, including mediation by Warsaw, Berlin or Washington. Orbán responds to Zelenskyy's invitation and visits Ukraine, in particular the city of Bucha, where Russian soldiers committed massacre and where the Hungarian ecumenical service is already working.

Ukraine avoids public demands and accusations aimed at Budapest regarding military cooperation, and also revives the dialogue on national minorities through the work of the intergovernmental commission on the rights of national minorities. Both sides focus on cooperation on the level of common interests in energy security (reversal of gas and fuel), logistics (export of Ukrainian grain, development of border infrastructure) and agriculture (food trade) rather than on political dialogue as such.

Scenario probability score: 1-5/10 - Probability will depend on the pressure on Hungary from the West regarding "certainty on Russia", as well as Budapest's feeling that it is in its interest or there is no alternative for Hungary but to abandon the constant balancing in favor of greater certainty regarding Russia and reducing Hungarian dependence on.

Third scenario: "Hungarian". Hungary will continue its present course with some correction. It is important to note that this is the same course it followed in 2014, after Russia's initial aggression in Ukraine with the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of part of Donbas.

This course is based on balancing between the West (EU, NATO) and the East (Russia, China), which in practice will include efforts to preserve all Russian contracts in Hungary (loan for Paks II, gas and oil contract, joint enterprises, etc.), criticism of anti-Russian sanctions and an attempt to block them along with an attempt to reach an agreement with the EU on unblocking recovery funds and the use of European funds, and with NATO on rearmament.

In addition, Hungary could try to become the voice of those European (first of all, German) and Western circles in general, which advocate appeasing Russia, against sanctions as counter-productive and for a return to "business as usual" with Moscow.

²⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-easteurope-banks-idINL8N2V571A>

This course could be publicly communicated as defending Hungarian national interests, as part of the struggle for EU strategic autonomy, an immediate end to the war and the start of peace talks.

Even with an attempt to balance this with pro-Ukrainian rhetoric, provided by the newly elected Hungarian President, Katalin Novák²⁵, de-escalation of the ethnic issue in bilateral dialogue, as well as a recall of the NATO veto, such behavior will provoke a symmetrical reaction from Kyiv, similar to the one begun in 2017. According to this scenario Ukrainian-Hungarian relations would remain mutually destructive and make both vulnerable to Russian malign influence.

Therefore, despite the temporary de-escalation against the backdrop of support for Ukraine's EU candidacy status, new scandals and flash points are very possible in the near future, especially surrounding important decisions regarding Russia, in particular the 7th package of sanctions.

Scenario probability score: 9/10., which means the most likely scenario due to the "weight" of the previous confrontation and huge dependence of Hungary from Russia, as well as low value of the Ukrainian-Hungarian relations as good-neighbourly for both side, very much antithetical vision and tactics by Kyiv and Budapest towards Russian aggression and its end, weak capacity to manage any sensitive topics, in particular Russian, at least for instance as Ukraine manages the same "Russian issue" with Turkey.

Conclusions as recommendations

It is clear that Ukrainian-Hungarian relations need not just a reset, but a systemic change. This is an extremely costly process in terms of time and resources, especially under conditions of dynamic and radical geopolitical changes in Europe.

Changes need to start on a very basic level, implementing steps that that have not been undertaken in years, even decades. These need to go beyond political gestures of understanding, meetings of leaders and high-level political dialogue. Without systemic changes in the architecture of bilateral relations, even Viktor Orbán acceptance of Zelenskyy's invitation to visit Bucha and condemnation of Russian war crimes would only create unnecessary and unjustified expectations. It is crucial to establish and maintain a systemic dialogue at the middle diplomatic and policy-designing level.

The first joint steps could be:

- 1:** Kyiv and Budapest have to finally agree and keep their word not to take unilateral actions or engage in sharp rhetoric and instead carefully coordinate all matter related to mutual relations, constructively discuss sensitive topics issues and seek compromise.
- 2:** On the middle level of the foreign ministries and diplomatic missions, Kyiv and Budapest should undertake a joint audit of all bilateral treaties, conventions and promises, in order to verify how each side interprets various point and what the expectations are. It should be a very open conversation behind closed doors involving decision-makers and the expert community.
- 3:** Find non-political topics for cooperation, such as border infrastructure development, development of high-speed railway connection, export of Ukrainian grain through Hungary, sale of Ukrainian electricity, import of Hungarian fuel and reverse gas flows.

For these steps to be effective and successful, it is necessary to develop an analytical framework for bilateral cooperation grounded in the new conditions of Russian aggression. The security of Hungarians in Ukraine is a component of Ukrainian state security and thus Ukrainian-Hungarian relations are an important element of the security and stability not only of both countries but of the entire eastern flank of NATO. This requires rethinking the policies and strategies of bilateral

²⁵ Since Katalin Novák was inaugurated as Hungary's new president in May 2022, she made several very straight statements in support of Ukraine and condemning Russia aggression, which goes in political contradiction with appeasing rhetoric by Viktor Orbán and the rest of the Fidesz <https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/president-novak-we-strongly-condemn-russias-unjustified-aggression-against-ukraine>

relations through the prism of European and Euro-Atlantic integration and as a common interest not only for Kyiv and Budapest, but also for Warsaw, Bratislava, Bucharest and Prague.

It is also important to rotate and engage new people from both sides who are not burdened by the institutional and political memory of mutual hostility of recent years, as well as disappointment, frustration and fatigue that resulted from previous attempts to come to an understanding.

It is important to create a network of liaisons in multilateral formats, based on V4+Ukraine+Romania, or Three Seas Initiative²⁶. Building this network could be implemented with the support of transatlantic programs of international organizations such as IRI. This network of experts from different countries could develop and advocate a new vision of good neighborliness, multilateral cooperation and security in Central and Eastern Europe under Transatlantic agenda and could play the same role for all countries in the region as the John Hay Initiative²⁷ for the Republican Party and American diplomacy in general, enrich U.S. foreign policy and Atlanticism. All this is sorely lacking not only in Ukrainian-Hungarian relations, but in all Central Europe, which now includes Ukraine.



²⁶ Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is a politically inspired, commercially driven platform for improving connectivity between 12 EU Member States allocated between Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas, which create and unite eastern flank of the EU and NATO. The United States of America, Germany, and the European Commission are the strategic partners of the Initiative. In the Riga summit of 3SI in 2022, Ukraine received the status of a partner-participant.

²⁷ <https://www.thedailybeast.com/romney-foreign-policy-team-is-schooling-2016s-republicans>