



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 27, 2023

Hungary Warns EU Against Abandoning Russian Energy, Gives Ethnic-rights Ultimatum to Ukraine

In a speech to Parliament on September 25, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared that abandoning Russian energy supplies would not be in the interests of EU member states.

Orbán also stated that Hungary could not do anything when it came to policies made by the EU regarding the import of Russian oil and gas.

“Brussels has decided that the EU should abandon Russian energy resources,” he said. “In my opinion, this is contrary to the interests of the bloc, and the interests of Hungary as well, but we do not have enough power to counteract this.”



AP Images
Viktor Orbán

The prime minister added that the Hungarian government could only mitigate the negative consequences of these moves for Budapest.

Hungary, which is dependent on Russian gas for around 85 percent of its energy needs, has repeatedly criticized the EU over its sanctions policy. Budapest has strongly opposed calls to introduce restrictions on Russian gas imports and has vowed to oppose any curbs on Russia’s nuclear energy industry.

The EU has banned imports of Russian seaborne oil since the beginning of the Ukraine conflict and drastically reduced shipments of pipeline gas from Moscow. The bloc has also adopted the Western price limit on Russian seaborne crude of \$60 per barrel.

Orbán managed to secure an exemption from the bloc’s sanctions on Russian crude oil imports. He has insisted that Budapest supports a swift resolution to the conflict, but noted that it wants to maintain economic relations with Russia, particularly in energy.

On the same day, Orbán also declared that Hungary would not back Ukraine “on any issue” until Kyiv reinstates the rights of ethnic Hungarians living on its territory, as Budapest’s support was crucial to Ukraine’s bid to join the EU.

“We will not support Ukraine on any issue in international life until it restores the laws that guarantee the rights of Transcarpathian Hungarians,” Orbán said, elaborating that “for years [the Ukrainians] have been tormenting” Hungarian schools.

Since 2017, legislation requiring the use of the Ukrainian language has led to the closure of around 100 Hungarian schools in Ukraine. In turn, the Council of Europe and [human rights](#) organizations have lambasted such laws.

Furthermore, Orbán posited that with the beginning of a new school year, the situation on the ground for ethnic Hungarians has worsened, with management at a school in the city of Munkacs banning the singing of the Hungarian national anthem or the wearing of Hungarian national colors on the first day



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back in the classroom.

Around 156,000 ethnic Hungarians reside in Western Ukraine, most of them in the region of Transcarpathia. Formerly a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this region was controlled by the Soviets after the Second World War, remaining under the jurisdiction of Kyiv once the Ukrainian SSR became modern Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, around 150,000 ethnic Romanians and more than 250,000 Moldovans call modern-day Ukraine home, with Bucharest joining Budapest to insist that Ukraine's language laws be amended.

In March this year, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó cautioned that Budapest would not back Kyiv's bid to join the EU and NATO until Kyiv addresses these issues.

Hungary does not supply any military aid to Ukraine or permit arms to enter the country. Nonetheless, Hungary enjoys veto power over whether Ukraine can join the EU and NATO due to both groupings mandating the unanimous consent of present members before welcoming new states. The dispute over language rights is merely one of several bilateral grievances between Budapest and Kyiv.

Additionally, Orbán's government has denounced the Ukrainian military's attempts to [conscript](#) ethnic Hungarians into military service and [impeded](#) EU military aid to Ukraine over Kyiv's sanctioning of one of Hungary's banks due to its lending activities in Russia. More recently, Hungary has banned the import of Ukrainian grain to safeguard the livelihood of Hungarian farmers, incurring Ukraine's wrath.

In [a speech on July 22nd](#), Orbán alluded to his long-term vision to raise Hungary to the European economic mainstream. The Hungarian leader pointed out that his government has "been building our new economic system for thirteen years," illustrating their achievements to date: "[The] Hungarian economy's overall performance has trebled: from 27 trillion forints to 80 trillion forints.... our goal is to have a GDP of 160 trillion forints by 2030.... in 2010 we stood at 66 percent of the European [per capita] average, in 2022 we were at 78 percent, and by 2030 we want to be at between 85 and 90 percent."

In June, amid his diplomatic tour in the Western Balkans to forge strategic partnerships, and campaign for the region's expedited EU accession, Orbán asserted that the conflict in Ukraine should not receive all the attention and money from the West as the Balkan region was Europe's "last significant resource reserve."

Based on Orbán's perspective, Europe's global competitiveness was on the decline, and thus the EU had to welcome countries in the West Balkans that had been promised EU membership decades ago before Ukraine. During his speech in Sarajevo, Orbán [said](#), "The Balkans is not a problem, but the last significant resource reserve of the European Union. What I am saying may sound strange, but today, the European Union needs the Balkans ... more than the other way around.... Accordingly, whatever is said in Brussels, we are in favor of a rapid accession of the Balkans ... to the European Union."

Orbán noted that Hungary was mounting pressure on Brussels to assign some of the EU cohesion funds meant for the Balkan countries before EU accession is finalized, to guarantee the region's sustained development.

"We cannot have all the money flowing into Ukraine," Orbán maintained, stating that the EU should concentrate more on the West Balkans' security and economic needs to benefit all Europe.



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