

The International, Foreign and Social Policies of Hungary

Hungarian international and foreign policy

- National interest based politics
- Pragmatic approach – tries to be on good terms with all geopolitical actors
- This leads to multivectoral diplomacy – balancing between Brussels, Washington, Moscow, Beijing
- This is also called the strategy of connectivity
- This creates tensions within the Western alliances (EU/NATO)

Foreign policy objectives

- The basis of PM Viktor Orbán's international policy is to increase Hungarian geopolitical power
- There is a shift in global power relations and Hungarian foreign policy tries to take advantage of this
- The previous world order was values based (liberal world order)
- Hungarian foreign policy is not value based, it is based on economic cooperation – investment cannot be onesided (Western) or focused on just one sector (automobile industry)
- Foreign policy is a tool to protect national sovereignty, economic interests and energy security
- The protection and support of Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries is an important aspect of foreign policy

National sovereignty

- The core of the idea of national sovereignty is that throughout its history Hungary has always been fighting for its sovereignty/independence from external actors
- The cultural experience is that of protecting the West from attacks from the East - protecting Western culture and way of life from external influences
- This is reflected in domestic and international policy even today
- The aim is to achieve political and economic independence
- This is complicated because of Western alliances, especially the EU membership

Balancing between East and West

- Hungary's geopolitical position has always influenced politics
- Hungarian society has always wanted to belong to the West but is proud of its Eastern roots as well
- It is a bridge between East and West
- Hungarian foreign policy uses this strategically (for example membership in Organization of Turkic States - OTS)

How does the policy of Hungarian national sovereignty influence EU relations?

- Instead of further centralization/federalisation Hungary wants a Europe of nation states
- Wants to go back to the time of the Founding fathers when the European project was more of an economic cooperation of states than a political project
- The Hungarian governing party Fidesz frequently clashes with EU leaders on issues linked to rule of law, migration, Ukraine war
- In order to have greater influence on EU politics Fidesz has participated in creating a new European party family, the Patriots for Europe
- Currently the third largest group in the European Parliament – right wing to far right parties, differing on many issues but having similar interests
- EU has withheld funds because of rule of law issues

Eastern opening policy

- Introduced by PM Viktor Orbán in 2010
- Aim is to reduce economic dependency on the West
- Increased trade, investment and diplomatic ties with China, Russia, India and the Turkic states
- Tries to attract high tech investments (for example phone and electric vehicle battery production)
- The long term outcomes of this strategy are debated (was it worth it?)
- Strong environmental concerns from citizens

International development/aid programs

- Twofold aim:
 - Help persecuted Christians in the world
 - Help manage migration by providing humanitarian aid in place
 - Hungary Helps organization a tool for carrying out these projects
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- Interesting approach, usually stronger geopolitical actors have aims such as these

Social policy

- Since 2010 government policy has favored a "work based society", or workfare system
- This means that instead of providing social benefits based on need (welfare), it supports those who work, pay taxes and have families
- Reduced unemployment benefits, public programs to reintroduce people to the world of work
- Aimed at middle-class families (tax breaks for families with children, also subsidies for buying homes)
- The system is critiqued for increasing inequalities, not helping the poorest
- All aspects of social policy have become more centralized