



By: The Editorial Board

European unity under test – can the Union withstand Orbán's game?



Viktor Orbán no longer conceals what he has covertly pursued for years. The Hungarian Prime Minister is now openly attempting to form a bloc of states within the European Union that would slow, limit, or completely reverse the policy of supporting Ukraine.

The plan is for **Budapest, Bratislava, and Prague** to coordinate their positions before each EU summit, act jointly, and exploit every institutional loophole to block decisions on funding and military aid to Kyiv.

What is formally presented as a "voice of reason" within the Union is, in reality, a project with three aims: to provide Hungary with political protection within the EU, to maintain close energy and political ties with Moscow, and to turn the internal weakening of the Orbán regime into a national campaign against "Brussels and war".

Elections 2026 – fear of losing power

In 2026, **Orbán** faces the most dangerous **election year** since coming to power. After sixteen years of absolute control, he is confronted by an opponent who possesses what all previous opposition leaders in Hungary lacked: credibility and energy.

Péter Magyar, formerly part of the Fidesz system, has become a magnet for disappointed centre-right voters and those who have not voted in years.

His TISZA Party entered the 2024 European elections as an outsider and emerged as a force that shook an order once considered immutable.

Orbán cannot fix the economy before April 2026, when elections are scheduled, but he can change the focus

Orbán is accustomed to winning by polarising. Now he is attempting to apply that formula

again, but with a new enemy. Instead of migrants, he is now using the war in Ukraine.

Domestically, the message is simple: Hungary is pressured to "participate in a war that is not its own", and only Fidesz "defends peace and the standard of citizens".

Everything from Brussels – from sanctions to aid for Ukraine – is used as evidence that the Union is pushing Hungary into conflict and poverty.

Weakened economic growth, corruption, inflation, falling real wages, and frozen European funds have created space for the narrative of an "enemy within" undermining national interests.

Orbán cannot fix the **economy** before April 2026, when elections are scheduled, but he can change the focus – turning the election into a referendum on "war and peace".

Political instrument – pressure through the Union

In this context, the formation of an anti-Ukrainian bloc in the EU becomes part of Orbán's political defence. In Brussels, he uses every discussion about aid to Ukraine as leverage on EU institutions – to delay decisions, slow payments, or force concessions in disputes involving Hungary.

At home, he turns this same action into political capital: he presents himself as the only leader with the strength to stand up to Brussels and "defend Hungary's interests" against more powerful actors.

For voters who live in constant fear of economic decline, it is a simple and understandable picture – Orbán is not blocking Europe but "protecting the people from war".

For years, Orbán has used the **veto** to test the boundaries of the European Union. In December 2023, he blocked the multi-year

financial framework for aid to Ukraine, causing a serious deadlock in decision-making.

In May 2024, he again blocked funds from the shared European fund for military support to Kyiv. At each summit, he tests how far he can go before the rest of the Union loses patience.

Now he is trying to make that pressure more permanent – by gathering a few allies, he is no longer alone against everyone but part of a minority that jointly slows decisions and changes the tone of European policy towards Ukraine.

These three governments are not necessarily united by affection towards Moscow, but by the sense that European policy on the war in Ukraine is losing momentum

Robert Fico of Slovakia openly ended all cooperation in the delivery of weapons to Ukraine, explaining that Slovakia "will not pay for someone else's war."

Andrej Babiš announced the Czech Republic's withdrawal from European military support programmes and a return to a policy of "internal priorities."

Orbán sees this as an opportunity to build his own framework of influence – three governments that do not agree on everything but share the same goal: to limit the pace and scope of European aid to Ukraine and show that there is a bloc within the Union that no longer accepts decisions without objection.

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After three years of war and rising costs, impatience is growing in many countries, and doubts are increasing about how long the Union can maintain the same level of support.

Orbán sees this as an opportunity: he is trying

to turn this discontent into a political front, to shape it and direct it against those members who still want Ukraine to receive full aid and a clear European perspective.

The Trump effect and the new space for manipulation

Donald Trump's return to the White House in early 2025 has altered the relationship between Europe and the United States. Washington has limited military aid to Ukraine and made it clear that Europe must now bear much of the responsibility itself.

In these circumstances, any difference of opinion within the European Union becomes more significant than before. Orbán recognises this and uses the opportunity to weaken the joint position and demonstrate that the Union is no longer united, even on matters of war and security.

Trump's policy, paradoxically, has created space for those seeking to weaken the European position

His rhetoric now has new legitimacy: if the US is reconsidering its support for Ukraine, why should Europe persist with an increasingly costly and unpopular course? He does not need to be openly pro-Russian; it is sufficient to become the voice of "realism".

In practice, this means sabotaging aid packages, delaying procedures, and promoting the idea of a "quick peace" – a euphemism for freezing the front and tacitly accepting Russian conquests.

Trump's policy, paradoxically, has created space for those seeking to weaken the European position. While the US administration reduces its own involvement, Orbán presents himself as the **voice of reason** in a Union that has "lost its sense of proportion". This narrative fits perfectly with his campaign message.

Limitations and risks

However, his strategy has its limits. The Czech Republic and Slovakia cannot afford an open break with the EU. Their economies depend on European funds, markets, and investments, and every political confrontation with Brussels comes at a cost.

Orbán knows this, but it does not deter him – he is satisfied when a united front fails in the EU Council and every decision is debated for days.

The political effect among the domestic public has already been achieved: Hungary "defends its position" while "Brussels exerts pressure".

The Baltic countries, Poland, the Nordic countries, and key Western European capitals remain consistent in their support

The majority of European Union members still support Ukraine. The Baltic countries, Poland, the Nordic countries, and key Western European capitals remain consistent with that policy and thus maintain the basic framework of **joint action**.

However, every new delay in decision-making and every public division within the Union benefits Orbán: he uses them as evidence that Europe no longer has a clear will or confidence in its own politics.

European test

In the coming months, the European Union will have to demonstrate that it can pursue a consistent policy even when some of its members openly work against shared decisions.

If it succeeds, Orbán's attempt will be remembered as a passing episode – a move by a leader who, before the election and with declining support at home, tried to turn the war in Ukraine into a means of his own

survival.



If the Union does not find a way to overcome blockades and vetoes, the consequences will be more serious

If the Union does not find a way to overcome blockades and vetoes, the consequences will be more serious. Any subsequent decision to help Ukraine will become politically exhausting, and Orbán's model will set a precedent.

It will show that European politics can be obstructed from within, that unity does not have to collapse to be undone – it is enough for a few governments to decide not to follow a shared path any longer.

For Viktor Orbán, it would be a political triumph before the elections: proof that he can change the course of European politics without leaving the Union. For Europe, it would be evidence that its weakness is institutional, not merely political.

Orbán understands all this better than many of his colleagues. He is not seeking a conflict with Brussels to win it but to prolong it – long enough to survive the next election.

If he succeeds, Europe will only then realise that the war in Ukraine was just one of the arenas on which it was losing and that the real battlefield was within its own institutions.