



By: TA | AP Insight

Restoring Hungary's Western orientation—the election campaign of Orbán's opponents launched



Hungarian opposition leader Péter Magyar launched his party's election campaign in Budapest on Sunday, vowing to restore Hungary's Western orientation just eight weeks before he faces Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in a pivotal vote.

Magyar, a former insider in Orbán's nationalist Fidesz party, burst onto **Hungary's political scene** in 2024 after breaking with his political community and quickly forming the center-right Tisza party.

After taking around 30% of the vote in **European Parliament elections** in June 2024, he has grown Tisza into the **most formidable political force** Orbán has faced during his 16 years at Hungary's helm.

Most independent polls show Tisza with a significant lead before the April 12 vote, an advantage which has held steady for more than a year.

"We're standing on the threshold of victory with 56 days left to go," he told supporters during his speech at an exposition center in Budapest on Sunday. "Tisza stands ready to govern."

Magyar has **vigorously campaigned** across Hungary's rural, conservative heartland — traditionally an Orbán stronghold — holding rallies and town hall events in scores of villages and towns.

He has focused on bread and butter issues such as low wages and rapidly rising living costs that have made Hungary one of the poorest countries in the European Union.

Magyar accuses Orbán and his government of mismanaging Hungary's economy and social services, and overseeing unchecked corruption he says has led to the accumulation of extreme wealth within a small circle of well-connected insiders while leaving ordinary Hungarians behind.

He has also criticized Orbán for conducting a combative foreign policy with the EU while maintaining close ties to Russia despite its war

in neighboring Ukraine.

On Sunday, Magyar pointed to meetings he held with numerous European leaders at the Munich Security Conference in Germany over the weekend, and said he would put an end to Hungary "**drifting out of the European Union**" under Orbán.

"Hungary's place is in Europe, not only because Hungary needs Europe, but also because Europe needs Hungary," he said.

Magyar's comments contrasted starkly with statements Orbán made a day earlier at his own campaign launch, where he said the **real threat facing Hungary** was not military aggression from Russia, but the European Union.

Tisza's program

In a 239-page program released last week, Tisza outlined its plans for how it would govern Hungary if it wins April's elections. Fidesz has not released a program, arguing that after governing for 16 years, its voters know what kinds of policies to expect.

On Sunday, Magyar reiterated that his party plans to retain a fence Orbán's government built along the country's southern border in 2015, and said he would maintain Fidesz's policies of opposing illegal immigration and any accelerated procedure for Ukraine to join the EU.



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However, Magyar has vowed to bring home billions in funding the **EU has suspended** to Hungary over its concerns that Orbán has eroded democratic institutions, reduced judicial independence and failed to tackle corruption.

The program also pledges to fulfill conditions for adopting the euro currency by 2030, and to invest in Hungary's faltering state health care and public transportation sectors.

Tisza also plans to crack down on corruption and recover public funds it argues have been funneled into the hands of government-connected oligarchs.

"It is time to call corruption what it is: theft," Magyar said Sunday.

Tisza's candidates

For its candidates in each of Hungary's 106 individual voting constituencies, Tisza has largely drawn on political neophytes locally active as entrepreneurs, doctors, economists, educators and other professionals.

Leading the ticket alongside Magyar are international energy expert Anita Orbán (no relation to the prime minister), whom the party tapped as its prospective foreign policy chief, and former Shell executive István Kapitány, who would fill a senior economy position in a future Tisza government.

Such candidates, Magyar has argued, will provide sectoral expertise he says is lacking under Orbán's government, and will help rebuild relations with Western partners and end Hungary's international isolation.

"I am proud that our experts are once again showing what it means to take the country's fundamental issues seriously and to plan our shared future," he said Sunday. "We don't plan to dominate this country, but to serve it."