



By: TA | AP Insight

Orbán's top diplomat left politics for an executive position at a Chinese auto giant



Hungary's former foreign minister resigned from his parliamentary seat on Wednesday to join Chinese automaker BYD, prompting criticism over his role in facilitating substantial government subsidies to the company while in office.

Péter Szijjártó was Hungary's top diplomat for nearly 12 years in the government of former populist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

He was relieved from his post after Péter Magyar's pro-European **Tisza party won a landslide election** in April, but remained a member of parliament.

Magyar accused him on social media of representing "foreign interests."

Szijjártó announces he has received a prominent offer

The former lawmaker wrote on Facebook that he had received "a highly prestigious offer" from the world's **top electric carmaker** "to fill an international position."

"BYD is one of the greatest success stories in the automotive industry over the past 20 years," Szijjártó wrote. "Starting today, I will continue my work as the executive responsible for the group's external relations and the development of new business lines."

Szijjártó, who had been an MP since 2002, had missed most parliamentary votes since the April election and rarely appeared in public or posted on social media.

The former diplomat helped BYD secure major subsidies

While serving in government, Szijjártó was instrumental in securing foreign investments in Hungary from Chinese companies, including his now-employer BYD, which received considerable state subsidies during his tenure.

In 2023, Szijjártó announced that BYD would open its **first European factory in Hungary** — allowing the conglomerate to skirt European Union import tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles imposed to protect the continent's domestic auto manufacturing sector.

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Szijjártó played a central role in talks with BYD on bringing the plant to Hungary and said at the time that the decision came after 224 rounds of negotiations between the company and Hungary's government.

He called the project "one of the largest investments in Hungarian economic history," saying the government would provide financial incentives to BYD for building the plant, which have not been disclosed.

In 2025, Szijjártó also announced BYD would locate its European headquarters and a research and development center in Budapest and receive 20 billion forints (\$63.7 million) in government assistance.

While in office, Szijjártó and Orbán opposed EU tariffs on Chinese products, sought major investment from Beijing and opened a series of **Chinese EV battery manufacturing plants** across the country.

Orbán's government and Beijing also jointly developed a rail corridor between Hungary and Serbia that is part of China's "Belt and Road" global trade initiative.

Magyar lambasts Szijjártó's role in BYD subsidies

Prime Minister Péter Magyar wrote on social media Wednesday that Szijjártó had "long represented foreign interests" and pointed out that he had "previously lobbied to secure massive Hungarian state subsidies" for BYD.

“In hindsight, it may now become clear even to Fidesz voters whose interests the former foreign minister of the failed Orbán government represented in connection with the ... investments in the battery and automotive industries,” Magyar wrote.

Controversy surrounded Szijjártó's time in office

While foreign minister, Szijjártó maintained close relations with Russia despite its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022.



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Breaking with nearly all of his EU counterparts, he frequently **traveled to Moscow** to negotiate agreements on purchasing Russian oil and gas and to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, whom he referred to as his “friend.”

Szijjártó was awarded the Russian Order of Friendship in 2021 by President Vladimir Putin, one of the highest state honors a foreign citizen can receive.

He was embroiled in controversy during Hungary's 2026 election campaign when the Washington Post reported that he made regular phone calls to Lavrov during high-level EU meetings with “live reports on what’s been discussed.”

Szijjártó dismissed the report while

acknowledging that he conferred with Lavrov before and after EU foreign minister meetings about their agenda and decisions.

In March, Orbán's government filed espionage charges against a prominent Hungarian investigative journalist for activities he engaged in while investigating Szijjártó's communications with Lavrov.

Those charges were dropped after Hungary's new government took office.