

# The building of Hungarian political influence — The Orbán regime's efforts to export illiberalism

Aims, instruments, actors, results

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This study would not have been possible without the conscientious, thorough and persistent work of Political Capital's interns.

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## Executive Summary

Building international influence is a core national interest and can bring many economic and diplomatic benefits to a country. However, the strategic aim of the Orbán regime's international influence-building is **to ensure the regime's long-term survival by trying to create an appropriate foreign policy environment for the government and to counter criticism and prosecutions for dismantling the rule of law and systemic corruption**. Thus, **although the Orbán regime justifies its international influence-building with national slogans, it does not yet seem to serve national interests beyond the regime itself**.

While Hungary's geopolitical weight is limited by its size, its geographical location makes it an important transit country and a mediator between the West and the East. In contrast to his predecessors, **Orbán aims to achieve a middle power status for Hungary in the European Union, or at least in the Central and Eastern European region**, to increase his room for manoeuvre and to maintain his regime in the long term.

**The Orbán government's foreign policy is based on the theory of realism, with interests and "national sovereignty" at its core**. It interprets the global power shift as the West eroding its own foundations and losing its dominance through liberal policies. Therefore, **on the one hand, Orbán seeks to develop good relations with the rising powers of the East, and on the other, he fights for a change in mainstream politics in the West**.

**While the Orbán government has invested significant efforts into building new alliances to change the existing power structures in the Euro-Atlantic area, Hungary is becoming increasingly alienated within its own alliance system**. This is also because **the Orbán regime has built its international relations not through institutions but through parties or individual politicians**. As most of the government's international allies and partners are not in government, Hungary's ability to assert its interests has been weakening. Most of the economic benefits of influence-building have not materialised in the national economy but in the companies close to the government.

To achieve its goals, **the Orbán regime often uses unconventional tools also in foreign policy**. These have repeatedly brought the Hungarian Prime Minister and the country into the international spotlight. In this way, Viktor Orbán has increased his relevance and significantly transformed his image: from a former liberal politician to a flag-bearer of illiberalism and an internationally renowned figure of the populist right and far right.

### Foreign policy goals of the Orbán regime:

- overthrowing the political mainstream in the Euro-Atlantic system and achieving a change of social/cultural hegemony;
- establishing strong bilateral and economic relations with countries in the East and the South;
- building a network of allied countries and committed politicians in the Western Balkans and the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, opposed to mainstream European politics;
- building good relations and economic influence with neighbouring countries;
- establishing hegemony among Hungarian communities living in neighbouring countries to win their votes.

### Main tools for building political influence:

- ideology-based influence-building;
- building media influence;
- building economic influence.

### **Main Hungarian actors of influence-building:**

- **prominent politicians of the Orbán regime** (e.g., PM Viktor Orbán, President of the Republic Katalin Novák, Political Director of the Prime Minister Balázs Orbán, Minister of Justice Judit Varga, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó), **and Hungarian diplomats,**
- **government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) and "think tanks"** (e.g., Alliance for a Civic Hungary Foundation, Centre for Fundamental Rights, Mathias Corvinus Collegium),
- **business intermediaries.**

### **The Orbán regime is building political influence in EU member states, in the US, in the CEE region, in the Western Balkans, and among Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries.**

- By now, **the Orbán regime has allied or partner parties in almost every EU member state based on the parties' support for Fidesz and ideological similarities or sympathy for Orbán's policies.** The most important ones are the Polish Law and Justice (PiS), the Italian League and the Brothers of Italy (FdI), the Spanish Vox and the French National Rally (RN). Fidesz also has partners among the mainstream parties, such as the French Republicans (LR), the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), the Direction - Slovak Social Democracy (Smer) and Forward Italy (FI).
  - **Political Capital's online infographic on Fidesz's EU-wide partner network is [accessible here.](#)**
- In the **United States of America, Fidesz has built close ties with the Republican Party, especially with its Trumpist wing.** In this process, Orbán's anti-immigration and anti-gender policies, the activities of Hungarian GONGOs, the US lobbyists he has hired, and biased coverage in pro-Trump US media have played a significant role.
- **In the Western Balkans, media acquisitions and other economic activities (including corruption) are the primary tools of influence-building.** The main allies are Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, former Slovenian PM Janez Janša, President of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina Milorad Dodik and in North Macedonia Nikola Gruevski's party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity.
- **Among Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries,** the main tools of influence-building are financial support for organisations, bringing Hungarian political actors into a position of dependency, media and sports investments, and real estate purchases.

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# 1. The place of the Orbán regime in international politics

## 1.1. Geopolitical weight of Hungary

The Orbán regime's position in international politics is fundamentally determined by Hungary's geopolitical status, which is based on two characteristics. The first is its geographical location, which makes Hungary an important transit country in many respects, and the second is its role as a mediator in a broader sense, which implies that Hungary is a bridge between East and West, both culturally and economically. In line with Hungarian foreign policy traditions and the governments in office since the regime change, the Orbán regime has largely based its foreign policy vision and strategy on these two characteristics. **Viktor Orbán aims to achieve a kind of middle power status in the European Union, or at least in the Central and Eastern European region, to increase his room for manoeuvre and to maintain his regime in the long term.** To fulfil these ambitions, he seeks to become a trendsetter abroad, while at home, he is sending out sovereignist political messages that allegedly promote Hungarian interests. According to Orbán, although Hungary is part of the Euro-Atlantic alliance system, it does not have to align itself with Western values and interests completely<sup>1</sup>. Instead, regional and global powers, like the USA, Russia, China, Germany and Turkey, must be made interested in the success and stability of the Orbán regime (in Viktor Orbán's words: Hungary).<sup>2</sup> Hence, building good relations with the West and the East can raise Hungary's international profile.

**To achieve its strategic goals, the Orbán regime often uses unconventional tools also in foreign policy. It often does not seek to build good relations and settle conflicts but to sharpen differences and create a divide.** Such tools include, for example, the establishment of new relations (e.g. joining the Organisation of Turkic States), the attempt to build alliances for defence and defiance (e.g. between Hungary and Great Britain<sup>3</sup> or Hungary and Poland), the effort to acquire influence (e.g. via the Conservative Political Action Conference, CPAC, the most significant Republican annual event; the activities of Hungarian GONGOS; and commissioning of international lobbying firms), Europe-wide opinion polls, talking out of their own (Euro-Atlantic) alliance system, taboo-busting rhetoric, communication campaigns, as well as trolling, blackmailing and obstruction of international decisions (through the use of vetoes and veto threats).

In the last decade, the Orbán regime and the Hungarian Prime Minister have become the focus of international attention several times, which, while mostly meant appearing in a negative context, has strengthened their weight and importance across Europe and beyond. **By exploiting the so-called 'European refugee crisis' in 2015** (e.g., by building the border fence and spreading anti-immigration messages) **and his anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI policies<sup>4</sup>, Viktor Orbán has been able to appeal to many in Western and Northern Europe and has appeared as a role model on the far-right.** As a result, **Viktor Orbán** has gone from being a liberal politician who fought for regime change to **a flag-bearer of illiberalism and a renowned figure of the populist right and far-right internationally.** In recent years, he has been consciously trying to build influence in the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), which is of great security policy importance for the whole of Europe. The growing importance of the Orbán regime is also demonstrated by the fact that the Hungarian prime minister has been able to present himself as an international factor in several European elections, either as a negative or positive example or even as a source of danger. In addition to Europe, the Hungarian prime minister is also seeking to play an exemplary role in the USA, two signs of which were CPAC Hungary, the first-ever European CPAC event, and CPAC Texas with Orbán as a keynote speaker.

## 1.2. The foreign policy vision and goals of the Orbán regime

Not only the international movement of the Orbán regime is part of a cross-border network, but also the ideology that underpins it. The **ideologic system of Orbán** is not merely drawn from an inward-looking, traditionally nationalist or ethnicist ideology but **is part of a modernised, authoritarian right-wing and far-right ideology with international connections, which has rebranded itself as "sovereignist".** In Orbán's vision, through its liberal policies, the West is eroding its own foundations and losing its dominance. Therefore, the Orbán government aims to develop good relations with the emerging powers of the East, on the one hand, and fight to change mainstream politics in the West, on the other. Viktor Orbán hopes that in Europe, tired of a series of crises (migration, covid, energy, economic, etc.), more and more people will come to share his principles and positions. This will also serve the sustainability of his own regime in Hungary by creating a more favourable international environment.

**In line with the strategic goal of maintaining its system in Hungary, the Orbán regime pursues partly different foreign policy objectives across various regions.**

- In the **Euro-Atlantic alliance system**, i.e., in the United States of America and the European Union, **the aim is to overthrow the political mainstream and to achieve a change of the social/cultural hegemony.** As Viktor Orbán has repeatedly stated in recent years, he does not want to leave the European Union but rather to change and transform it.
  - Accordingly, the Orbán regime wants a European Union that is as wide and less integrated as possible, where the so-called "Europe of Nations" concept can prevail, which also means that there is no interference from the EU level in the affairs of individual Member States based on democratic values and the principles of the rule of law.
- **With Eastern and Southern countries, the aim is to establish strong bilateral and economic relations** in the framework of the Eastern and Southern Openings, based on "mutual respect".
- **In the Western Balkans and the Central and Eastern European region, the aim is to build a network of allied countries and committed politicians** opposed to European mainstream politics.
- **In the countries neighbouring Hungary, the aim is, on the one hand, to build good relations and cross-border economic influence** and, on the other hand, **to establish hegemony among Hungarian communities** to win their votes.

## 2. The building of "Hungarian" influence – tools, themes, actors

### 2.1. The main tools for building political influence

The main tools for influence-building are ideology-based influence-building, building media influence and building economic influence.

#### 2.1.1. Ideology-based influence-building

The ideology-based influence-building is linked to Fidesz's international networking: **the party and its agents have sought to build close ties and alliances with nationalist, ultra-conservative, religious, populist radical right and even far-right actors and international organisations in other countries for years** – and more than ever since the 2021 split from the European People's Party. To build relations and alliances, they organise meetings, participate in joint events, speak at each other's campaign events, and coordinate their positions and strategies. The main targets for ideology-based networking and influence-building are populist radical right and far-right parties in Europe to create a European alliance of populist actors. However, the United States and other parts of the world (e.g., Brazil and Mexico<sup>5</sup>) have also become the focus of these activities. **The cooperation is strictly focused on common topics.** Even though these actors are divided on several issues (e.g., relations with Russia,

some policy issues, personal differences, and especially power interests), they do not address the (potential) differences.

**Their main topics and ideological positions that connect these actors are as follows:**

- **Anti-immigration:** They all reject migration, which in their interpretation, is a threat to Christianity, the Western culture and civilisation, and the 'native' white population.
- **Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI:** They object to gender and LGBTQI rights under the pretext of protecting the "traditional family", also linked to the issue of migration ("the reproduction of the indigenous white Christian population"), and, increasingly, in the guise of "child protection". In addition, the topic is part of the struggle against the "decadent and declining" liberal and left-wing ideology and the alleged oppression.
- **Rejection of deeper European integration,** based on the motto, nation/country first. However, criticism or rejection is typically less expressed against the influence of authoritarian states (e.g., Russia or China) but primarily against closer cooperation with democratic countries and international institutions (e.g., the EU).
- **Anti-liberalism:** Opposing liberalism and liberal elites that allegedly oppress nations ("Brussels"), restrict freedom of expression (e.g., via political correctness or the social media) and threaten "normality" (e.g., immigration, gender) is a common feature of the populist radical right and far-right parties. Anti-liberalism forms the ideological framework of anti-establishment and anti-elitism.

### 2.1.2. Building media influence

Building influence in the media can be observed mainly in the Western Balkans, especially in North Macedonia and Slovenia, and among Hungarian communities living in neighbouring countries. **The aim is to turn local media outlets, bought by Fidesz-close intermediaries, into propaganda channels, similar to the situation in Hungary, to help Fidesz's local political allies through simplified, biased and hate-inciting messages, often based on conspiracy theories and disinformation.** The aim of controlling the Hungarian media in the neighbouring countries is primarily domestic: to win the votes of dual Hungarian citizens by controlling the Hungarian public discourse and politics beyond the border. It is also used to influence the domestic politics of these countries.

### 2.1.3. Building economic influence

The economic influence-building happens through investments and aids in various sectors of the local economy, primarily also in the countries of the Western Balkans, the CEE region and that are immediately adjacent to Hungary (e.g., Serbia<sup>6</sup>, Bosnia<sup>7</sup>, regions inhabited by Hungarians living beyond the border<sup>8</sup>). Nonetheless, this includes also the EUR 10.6 million loan granted to Marine Le Pen by the Hungarian Commercial Bank during the 2022 French presidential election campaign<sup>9</sup>. In addition, there are also non-political investments serving the further financial enrichment of the businesspeople forming the economic basis of the Orbán regime (such as the hotel purchases abroad by Lőrinc Mészáros or István Tiborcz<sup>10</sup>).

## 2.2. The main actors of influence-building

### 2.2.1. Fidesz/government politicians, government officials

In addition to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the central players in the Orbán regime's influence-building are **prominent Fidesz and government politicians.**

- **Katalin Novák**, the current President of the Republic, former Vice President of Fidesz and Minister without Portfolio for Family Affairs, has actively forged ties with ultra-conservative, anti-gender and populist right-wing actors<sup>11</sup>.



- **Balázs Orbán**, Political Director of the Prime Minister and chairman of the board of trustees of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium, regularly participates in meetings with social and political actors from abroad and in events featuring radical populist ideologues and politicians (e.g., CPAC<sup>12</sup> and National Conservatism<sup>13</sup> conferences).
- **Judit Varga**, Minister of Justice, is networking with current and prospective political partners in Europe<sup>14</sup> and the US<sup>15</sup>.
- **Péter Szijjártó**, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, maintains relations abroad – also on official trips – with representatives of smaller far-right parties<sup>16</sup> and former prime ministers<sup>17</sup>.

Hungarian diplomats working in foreign missions also actively support the networking process in the background.

### 2.2.2. Government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) and “think tanks.”

Fake civil society organisations (GONGOs) and “think tanks”, which are directly or indirectly created and/or are – presumably<sup>18</sup> – financed<sup>19</sup> by Fidesz/the government to establish illiberal hegemony<sup>20</sup>, are important actors in the networking. **They contribute to increasing the interest in and improving the image of the Orbán regime abroad by maintaining relations with (ultra)conservative social and populist radical right and far-right political actors, representing the ideologies and policies of the Hungarian government at international events and inviting opinion leaders, media personalities and even academics to Hungary** (e.g., through scholarships and to conferences). The most significant actors are:

- **Alliance for a Civic Hungary Foundation (SZPMA)**: It is the party foundation of Fidesz, which also has a representation in Brussels. In addition to continuing cooperation with German conservative party foundations<sup>21</sup>, it is actively involved in building relations with populist radical right and far-right actors.
- **Center for Fundamental Rights (AKK)**: Founded in 2013, the organisation is one of the main actors in international networking (e.g., it was the main organiser of the CPAC in Budapest) and has received at least HUF 2.5 billion in state funding until the end of 2021<sup>22</sup>. In addition, it regularly represents the interests and messages of the Orbán government to the Hungarian public and at international forums (e.g., EP hearings).
- **Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC)**: Founded in 1996, the institute was fully integrated into the Fidesz network in 2020 when Balázs Orbán became its leader,<sup>23</sup> and the institute received various assets worth HUF 500 billion from the state<sup>24</sup>. It is a prominent actor in international networking<sup>25</sup> by inviting foreign academics and opinion leaders to Hungary and participating in events abroad (e.g., CPAC and National Conservatism conferences). In November 2022, MCC opened an office in Brussels.
- **Danube Institute**: Founded in 2013 by the publicly funded<sup>26</sup> Lajos Batthyány Foundation, it aims to act as an intermediary between different academic, expert, political and cultural actors, as well as between Central Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world. It provides fellowships and organises national and international conferences and events.
- **Political Network for Values (PNfV)**: It is an umbrella organisation mainly of anti-abortion organisations and politicians from 30 countries, founded in 2014<sup>27</sup> and chaired by Katalin Novák until 2022<sup>28</sup>. Among other smaller events, its flagship is the biannual Transatlantic Summit. The Political Network for Values Association, registered under the same name in Hungarian, was supported by the Hungarian government with HUF 38 million in 2020.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.2.3. Business intermediaries

The investments of Fidesz-close businesspeople serve political influence-building directly in the media primarily, although indirectly, and in the longer term, investments in other areas can also be a suitable tool for influence-building.

## 3. The process and targets of influence-building across regions

### 3.1. Influence-building in the European Union

Cooperation between the EU's populist radical right and far-right parties has intensified in the wake of the so-called European refugee crisis in 2015. Before the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections, the parties tried to forge an alliance. The alliance building among the parties – which finally failed due to power differences – was not only promoted by the Kremlin, which has been interested in weakening the European Union (for example, through the Valdai Club meetings<sup>30</sup>), but also by Donald Trump's former adviser Steve Bannon. Fidesz was not a central player in these processes at that time, as the party was still a member of the European People's Party, but relations were already being built with some of the actors (e.g., Orbán met with Steve Bannon<sup>31</sup>). However, since 2021, Fidesz has been actively involved in the alliance-building process aimed at the 2024 EP elections.

In recent years, meetings between representatives of the populist radical right and far-right parties, appearances or video messages at each other's electoral rallies, and large-scale international events involving well-known and popular intellectual, cultural and media actors close to the populist political actors, have become frequent ways of establishing and deepening cooperation. Fidesz politicians and Fidesz-close GONGOs and "think tanks" are also active participants in and hosts of discussions and international public events (e.g., CPAC Hungary<sup>32</sup> and the 4th Transatlantic Summit<sup>33</sup> in May 2022). **Fidesz's partner parties are mainly members of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) groups. Still, they can also be found in other groups.** The EP vote of 15 September 2022 on the Delbos-Corfield report on the rule of law in Hungary gives an overview of these parties. The parties that rejected the report can be considered Fidesz's allies, and those that voted for it, Fidesz's critics and opponents. Those parties whose representatives present neither rejected nor supported the proposal in their majority, or abstained, or did not vote for tactical reasons, are either Fidesz's looser partners, that only wish to cooperate to a limited extent, or are parties, typically from neighbouring or CEE countries, which presumably do not want to confront the Hungarian governing party.

**Based on the vote on the Delbos-Corfield report, the quantity of contact, and the ideological closeness, Fidesz's main allies are the Polish Law and Justice (PIS; with which relations have deteriorated somewhat as a result of the Hungarian pro-Kremlin position on the Russian war against Ukraine, but the extent and impact of this are not yet clear), the Italian League<sup>34</sup> and Brothers of Italy (Fdi)<sup>35</sup>, the Spanish Vox<sup>36</sup> and the French National Rally (RN)<sup>37</sup>.** There are also close ties with the leaders of the **Austrian Freedom Party<sup>38</sup>** and the **Dutch Freedom Party<sup>39</sup>**, and links are being built with the **Czech Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)<sup>40</sup>**, the **Belgian Flemish Interest (VB)<sup>41</sup>**, the **Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE)<sup>42</sup>**. Populist and far-right parties in many other countries also support Viktor Orbán's policies and see the Hungarian Prime Minister as a role model.

Other important partners **in the EPP include the Hungarian Democratic Alliance of Romania (RMDSZ), former Prime Minister Janez Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and the French Republicans (LR).** Moreover, former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš's<sup>43</sup> **ANO 2011 party from the liberal Renew group** and former Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico's **Direction - Slovak Social Democracy (Smer) party from the S&D group are also among Fidesz's important allies and partners.** Although the **Alternative for Germany (AfD)** has strong sympathies for Fidesz<sup>44</sup>, the Hungarian governing party is keeping a distance from it to not jeopardise its remaining relations with mainstream German conservative parties (e.g., both the CDU and CSU party foundations have maintained cooperation with Fidesz in Hungary).

All in all, by now, Fidesz has allied and partner parties almost in all EU member states, as shown in [Political Capital's online infographic, accessible here.](#)

### 3.2. Influence-building in the US

Since the first half of the 2010s, the Orbán regime has maintained relations with US ultra-conservative, anti-abortion and anti-gender organisations, thanks to its participation in international events (e.g. the World Congress of Families, One of Us and Political Network for Values events and the Budapest Demographic Summits).<sup>45</sup> Hungary, however, became of particular interest to US conservatives after 2015, when the Orbán government started to pursue a radical anti-immigration policy, reflected by the spreading of the "great replacement" conspiracy theory, which has been widely shared within the US far right and even parts of the Republican Party,<sup>46</sup> and the erection of a fence along Hungary's Southern border. **Closer links with the Republican Party, especially its Trumpist wing and individuals and organisations close to it, were forged during Trump's presidency and have been strengthened since.** The following factors – individuals, organisations, events, and meetings – have contributed to this.

- The Hungarian prime minister was the first of the incumbent heads of state and government to express support for Trump in July 2016, which has surely boosted Viktor Orbán's reputation among US Republicans, especially Trump and his supporters.<sup>47</sup>
- Sebestyén Gorka, who served as Donald Trump's national security adviser until the summer of 2017 and was also an adviser to Viktor Orbán, could have been an important factor in building the relationship.<sup>48</sup>
- In 2018 and 2019, the Hungarian government engaged several US lobbying organisations (Policy Impact Strategic Communications, Barnes & Thornburg, Munk Policy & Law, Greenberg Traurig) to help strengthen bilateral relations, improve its image in the administration, lobby the Senate, coordinate government affairs and media appearances, and specifically to support the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó, to appear on Fox News.<sup>49</sup>
- From 2020 onwards, the leaders of the Centre for Fundamental Rights (Miklós Szánthó and István Kovács) regularly attended CPAC events, and in May 2022, the first European CPAC was held in Budapest.<sup>50</sup>
- Tucker Carlson, who came to Budapest at the invitation of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium<sup>51</sup>, generated a lot of media attention in the US for his broadcasts about Hungary on Fox News in the summer of 2021.
- Orbán's image in the US may have also been improved because he is a successful political leader who led his community to victory for the umpteenth time in 2022 when many had predicted a close result.

**Just as the cooperation among European populist radical right and far-right parties is cautiously focused on common issues and differences that slow down and hinder the alliance-building are disguised, the relationship between American and Hungarian populist radical actors is also based on a "common set".** This is how, for example, US Republicans are not scared off by Orbán's economic policy based on strong state intervention and control. This is also supported by the fact that from the viewpoint of American politics, society and economy, Hungary is a distant and less significant country, and therefore little is known about it. The myth about Hungary being a traditionalist, conservative, Christian country whose government is under attack from the global left and liberals because it has allegedly stopped migration and supported families, can easily fill this lack of knowledge.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.3. Influence-building in the Western Balkans

Hungarian private or public investment has been noticeable and significant in some Western Balkans countries since at least 2017. These investments were usually presented as economically beneficial or as amounts to help Hungarians living beyond the border. However, these investments are mainly aimed at building and strengthening political alliances and supporting allies.

- **In Slovenia and North Macedonia**, private companies owned by Fidesz-close businesspeople started buying local media in 2017 to support Orbán's local political allies like Nikola Gruevski and his party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) in North Macedonia, and Janez Janša, the president of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), in Slovenia.<sup>53</sup>
- **In Serbia**, President of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and president of the country since 2017, Aleksandar Vučić has maintained close strategic and economic ties with Hungary and Viktor Orbán since his election to prime minister in 2014<sup>54</sup>. They have a good understanding of most issues and have joint investments<sup>55</sup>. The Hungarian state has also allocated large amounts of public money to a media agency close to Vučić and the SNS<sup>56</sup> and a Hungarian organisation in Vojvodina allied to the SNS<sup>57</sup>.
- **The influence-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina is concentrated on the Republika Srpska**, partly in overt financial flows. In 2021, Viktor Orbán agreed with Milorad Dodik, Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska and leader of the Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) party, to set up a Hungarian development fund to support Serbian small and medium-sized enterprises<sup>58</sup>. These funds were distributed in the months before the 2022 Bosnian elections<sup>59</sup>. The Hungarian government has also repeatedly announced that it would protect Dodik from potential EU sanctions.<sup>60</sup>

### 3.4. Influence-building in Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries

Since the early 2010s, vast sums of money have been transferred from Hungary to Hungarian communities living in the neighbouring countries. These have primarily been used to support local Hungarian organisations, sports and media, but a lot has also been spent on purchasing buildings and agricultural subsidies. The aims of the investments were 1) to win votes for Fidesz in Hungarian elections from dual Hungarian citizens living in the neighbouring countries; 2) to spread Fidesz's messages among Hungarians beyond the border; 3) to influence the local situation through controlling and making the Hungarian organisations and local Hungarian parties dependent. A significant part of the funding came from the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd (BGA Ltd): between 2011 and 2021, €687.9 million were transferred to Hungarian organisations in Romania, €144 million in Slovakia, €143 million in Serbia, €26.6 million in Croatia and €17.4 million in Slovenia - a total of over €1 billion in the five countries.<sup>61</sup>

## Appendix - Fidesz's allies and partners in the European Union

*The list of Fidesz's closer and looser allies by country, based on their support for Fidesz in the EP vote on the so-called Delbos-Corfield report, ideological closeness and sympathy for Orbán's policies, and frequency of contacts (for quotes from party leaders indicating ideological closeness, see the [infographic available online](#))*

Member States	Fidesz's allies (EP Group)	Fidesz's partners (EP Group)
Austria	Freedom Party of Austria – FPÖ (ID)	
Belgium	Flemish Interest – VB (ID)	
Bulgaria		Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Bulgarian National Movement – VMRO (ECR)*
Cyprus		
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ANO 2011 (RE) <i>(While the party supported the Delbos-Corfield report and has a different position on several topics, Babiš and Orbán have many similarities in tactics and tools.)</i></li> <li>• Freedom and Direct Democracy – SDP (ID)</li> </ul>	
Denmark		Danish People's Party – DPP (ID)
Estonia	Conservative People's Party of Estonia – EKRE (ID)	
Finland		Finns Party – PS (ID)
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Rally – RN (ID)</li> <li>• Reconquest – R! (NI)</li> </ul>	The Republicans – LR (EPP) <i>(LR has been Fidesz's partner for a long time, but the Fidesz-RN relationship now seems to be closer. Although Fidesz and LR have different positions on several issues, they share a common bond on anti-immigration.)</i>
Greece	Greek Solution – EL (ECR)	
The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Party for Freedom – PVV (ID)</li> <li>• JA21 (ECR)</li> <li>• Forum for Democracy – FvD (ECR)</li> </ul>	
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Croatian Sovereignists – HS (ECR)</li> <li>• Homeland Movement – DP (-)</li> </ul>	The Key of Croatia (former name: Human Shield – NI; KH)
Ireland		
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Law and Justice – PiS (ECR) <i>(Although the relationship has somewhat deteriorated as a result of the Hungarian pro-Kremlin position on the Russian war against Ukraine, its extent and impact are not yet clear.)</i></li> <li>• United Poland – SP (ECR)</li> </ul>	The Republicans – RP (ECR)

Latvia	National Alliance – NA (ECR)*	
Lithuania	Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance – LLRA (ECR)*	
Luxemburg		
Malta		
Germany		Alternative for Germany – AfD (ID) <i>(Although the two parties are close to each other in terms of political positions, Fidesz has no relation with the AfD because this would endanger the relationship with the German mainstream parties, especially the conservative Union parties, and also the Hungarian-German relationship.)</i>
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brothers of Italy – Fdi (ECR)</li> <li>• League (ID)</li> </ul>	Forward Italy! – FI (EPP) <i>(Although there remains a good personal relationship between Orbán and Berlusconi, the parties have now drifted apart, partly because of the FI's pro-EU stance. However, a possible change of direction could warm up the relationship.)</i>
Portugal		
Romania	Hungarian Democratic Alliance of Romania – RMDSZ (EPP)	
Span	Vox (ECR)	
Sweden		Sweden Democrats – SD (ECR) <i>(The SD is less active in the populist radical right and far-right cooperation, and is not closely associated with Fidesz, perhaps because of its moderation tactics.)</i>
Slovakia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direction – Slovak Social Democracy – Smer (SD)</li> <li>• Slovakian PATRIOT – PATRIOT (NI)</li> <li>• Republic – HR (NI)</li> </ul>	
Slovenia	Slovenian Democratic Party – SDS (EPP)	

\* The MEPs of that party did not take part in any of the votes on 15 September 2022, the day of the vote on the so-called Delbos-Corfield report, so their position on the issue is unknown.

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