

## Section A: Identification and Justification of Issue

Since the fall of communism in 1989, Hungary has not only transitioned to a democratic, capitalist system, but has joined the European Union. However, where there was once a sense of unity with the west and a desire to follow western ideals of democracy, strong nationalism and disdain towards the E.U have grown. Take Viktor Orban, Prime Minister of Hungary, who fought for the fall of the iron curtain; he now rails against E.U leadership and values. The E.U, on the other hand, has significantly grown, starting as an economic organization, it now includes 28 member nations and focuses on both political and economic unity . Hungary, as a member state of the E.U, has largely resisted its growing role, begging the question: **To what extent is the E.U able to influence Hungary into alignment with E.U ?**

My initial interest in the topic stemmed from my Eastern European background. My parents grew up under Soviet influence in Romania, a neighboring nation of Hungary, but immigrated to the U.S in the late 1990s. I grew up learning Western values, but I still had a close cultural connection to Romania and learned more traditional values at home. Although my parents often told me stories of life under communism, my visits to Europe were defined by frequent discourse on the negative impact of the E.U. With negative sentiments towards the E.U in the forefront of Eastern European politics, I decided to focus on one of the most controversial member nations: Hungary.

I began researching Hungary's communist past and its impact on Hungarian culture. Building on this background, I moved forward, listening to several of Orban's speeches, hearings in the European Parliament, and reading Fidesz party legislation. With a defined understanding of Hungarian culture and the populist movements in its politics, I will use my engagements to

explore how the E.U has gained influence within Hungary, and how it attempts to use this influence to create economic and political unity.

## Section B: Explanation of Engagement

For my initial research, I talked to a Hungarian resident for their perspective on Viktor Orban and the E.U. I posted on the Hungarian subreddit, and received a response explaining the popularity of Orban in rural areas specifically, Hungary's reliance on E.U funds. Furthering my research, I looked for professors with foreign policy expertise within Eastern Europe. With connections to Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, I made contact with the University via Facebook, and reached out to Professor Gabriel Mursa for an interview. Our interview focused on Hungary's strong, nationalistic views, and the influence of the Catholic Church and nationalism on Hungarian politics. Professor Mursa connected these sentiments with Hungary's anti-LGBTQ legislation, and the subsequent criticism from E.U leaders. He also pointed me toward Professor Maha, an expert on E.U funding and trade. This interview was extremely pertinent to my research question, as Professor Maha pointed out the economic interdependence of the E.U, specifically the widespread benefits of a free trade zone and the necessity for political stability due to the shared currency, the Euro. Heavily discussed was the building of E.U influence in Hungary and Hungary's dependence on E.U funds. Overall, I learned that through giving funds to Hungary after the fall of communism, the E.U gained influence, and now aims for both economic and political unity. While economic unity is welcomed in Hungary, strong nationalistic movements have built resistance towards political unity with the E.U.

## Section C: Analysis of the Issue

Since the fall of communism, Hungary has turned to the E.U for economic development. As Professor Mursa pointed out, Hungary, still developing its new government and

infrastructure, was given aid through its E.U membership, resulting in economic benefits for Hungary, including stimulus to GDP growth, higher wages and pension, and free movement of labor and goods(Benefits of E.U Membership). However, as Professor Maha emphasized, funding is by far the most important benefit. Provided through equal portions of member nation's' national incomes and import duties, Germany contributes the largest share of €12.8bn in the 2017 budget(Kovacevic 1), with France also contributing greatly. Hungary, on the other hand, has received €3bn more than it contributed to the budget(Kovacevic 1). The benefits of funding in Hungary are apparent; since joining the E.U in 2003, the GDP has grown from 103 billion U.S dollars to 163 in 2022(Hungarian GDP). By heavily aiding in the economic development of Hungary and continuing to supply funds, the Hungary has developed an economic dependence on Hungary. However, the E.U's prominent economic aid in Hungary is not without other impacts. By helping Hungary develop, the E.U established soft power, or influence in Hungary based on economic motivations. In turn, this influence has been successful in creating economic unity, with Hungary more than willing to give up it economic sovereignty to the E.U, operating under the same trade policy as the E.U and allowing the E.U to negotiate trade agreements for Hungary(Trade, European Commision).

Hungary has seemed more than eager to work with other E.U nations economically. Its Prime Minister, Viktor Obran, even advocated for strengthened relations with both Germany and France(Hungarian-German Economic Cooperation Must Be Strengthened, Press Office of the Prime Minister), stating that “there are excellent economic relations between the two countries. There are 670 French businesses operating in Hungary, providing jobs for 40,000 Hungarians”(Both Hungary and France Would Like a Succesful, Economically Strong Europe, Press Office of the Prime Minister). Hungary seems far more than willing to follow the economic

leadership of France and Germany, all due to strong economic ties. With France and Germany both being leaders of the E.U, it appears that E.U economic influence has been successful in pushing Hungary to give up its economic sovereignty and adopt E.U economic values. However, in order to ensure economic wealth, the E.U must also ensure political unity. As Professor Maha emphasized, the usage of the Euro in all member states means that any disunity in the E.U will affect the currency, and therefore the economies of all the member nations. This interdependence is what pushes the E.U to use its soft power in Hungary to influence Hungarian politics.

Despite cooperation on an economic basis, political conflicts have plagued Hungary's relationship with the E.U. Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, has stated many times that Hungary is an illiberal democracy, following many of the structures of Russia and China in its style of government(Bíró-Nagy 1). In fact, during my interview with Professor Mursa, he went on to highlight that Hungary has moved closer to the Kremlin, while the rest of the European bloc remains wary of Putin as a leader. Through the leadership of Orban, Hungary has stood against the E.U regarding political issues such as the entrance of refugees into Hungary, LGBTQ rights, and even freedom of speech(Serhan 2). In an attempt to persuade Hungary to abide by E.U values, the E.U has threatened several actions. These include using Article 7 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which allows voting rights to be withheld if a nation does not conform to the E.U's values(Could the E.U Kick Hungary Out?, the Conversation), or withholding funds from Hungary, with a top European Court already granting the E.U the power to do so(Top European Court Rules E.U. Can Freeze Aid to Poland and Hungary, New York Times). Though, as both Professor Maha and Professor Mursa discussed, it is very unlikely that the E.U will take action against

Hungary. The political conflict instead sheds light upon a deeper issue: the cultural divide between the West and Hungary.

Hungary had once looked towards the E.U as inspiration for democracy, aiming to uphold the same values and move away from communism. Primarily motivated by economic benefits and religious freedom, Hungarians embraced the ideas of liberal democracies. But, as the income gap grew along with the adoption of capitalism(Bíró-Nagy 2), Hungarian's began to associate less than positive values with the E.U. Instead, Hungarians moved back to their defining nationalistic identity, opposing many of the E.U's cultural values. As Professor Mursaa explained to me, the Catholic Church has held power in Hungary for centuries, and still remains a powerful institution in the nation today, heavily contributing to the political issues of the nation. In the former Soviet Puppet state, Hungarians were denied the right to worship. With the resistance of communism then came the strengthening of Catholic beliefs, with Hungary's identity and freedom heavily seated in its faith. On the other hand, Western Europe, not under the repression of communism, was able to develop its identity away from religion, becoming secular nations defined upon the individual freedoms granted their citizens. Combined with the present-day influence of the Catholic Church within Hungary, the religious identity of Hungarians has pushed them towards repression of LGBTQ issues, while the celebration of personal freedoms in Western Nations of the E.U have driven these same issues to the forefront of basic rights. The enforcement of E.U values within Hungary is seen as an infringement on Hungary's sovereignty, with Hungarians seeking to protect their culture against the issues of individual freedoms in the west. But while the E.U's imposition of values in Hungary has already manifested politically, it took on a much more physical issue in the issue of refugees.

The issue of refugee acceptance and treatment is a prominent issue within Hungary, exemplifying the nationalistic identity so common in its politics (Viktor Orban: The E.U's Disruptor in Chief?). Hungary has vehemently mistreated refugees (Why Hungary is so Awful to Refugees, Vox), despite E.U. policy requiring the nation to not only allow refugees, but provide them with homes, healthcare, education, and right to work, as Professor Mursa highlighted in our interview. Hungarians, guided by Orban's rhetoric, have viewed these demands as an invasion of the sovereignty of their borders. These issues largely stem from Hungary's long nationalistic history- as Professor Mursa explained to me, Hungarians have a long history of nationalism, with their borders and language becoming a defining aspect of Hungarian identity with their persistence over centuries despite the influence of much more powerful nations. In response to pressure from E.U. countries to accept refugees from Syria, Orban has drawn comparisons between the E.U. and Soviet Union, even claiming that the E.U. was unwilling to respect democracy unless it suited their goals (Viktor Orban: You are Condemning Hungary). These comparisons have drawn attention to Hungary's deep-rooted mistrust of stronger powers such as the E.U., highlighting the in-effectiveness of E.U. soft power in the nation.

In fact, even when the E.U. has attempted to use its soft power to force Hungary to respect liberal values, Hungary has refused to give in to pressure. Many, as Professor Mursa added, have already condemned the E.U. for acting not as an international organization, but as a state, challenging state sovereignty within Hungary by enforcing its values. But in Hungary, it remains highly unlikely that the E.U. will achieve its goal of an "ever-closer union". As mentioned in Section A, the organization was founded on the idea of such political and economic unity that

conflict would be almost impossible. Yet, with the ineffectiveness of soft power within Hungary, political disunity will only be continued. As Professor Maha highlighted, people in the more rural parts of Hungary, in particular farmers, remain unaware of the many economic benefits of the E.U and closely aligned to the traditional, Christian values of Hungary. The E.U pushing Hungary to abide by their values and protect the rights of minorities would only result in further animosity towards the E.U, giving support to Orban and similar right wing candidates within Hungary. Culture, in Hungary's case, is the defining factor of sovereignty, and not something that will be influenced by E.U soft power, no matter how economically beneficial. The E.U has already long been accused of behaving as a state rather than an international organization, and as long as it continues to do so, Hungary will view it as an invasion of their sovereignty and resist any influence for unity.

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