

Hungary Announces Veto on Oil Embargo

By [Free West Media](#)

Global Research, May 12, 2022

[Free West Media](#) 10 May 2022

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Oil and Energy](#)

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*Hungary has announced that it will veto the EU’s planned embargo on Russian oil imports. The country will not vote for the sanctions package as it will destroy Hungary’s secure and stable energy supply and make it impossible to source the oil needed for the economy, according to **Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó**.*

For the country, the measure means petrol prices at around 1,83 euros and an increase in the price of diesel fuel to around 2,10 euros. “We will not allow the Hungarian people to pay the price for the war,” stressed Szijjártó.

Prime minister **Viktor Orbán** earlier described the EU oil embargo as an “atomic bomb” dropped on the Hungarian economy. Last week Orbán explained that it would destroy the Hungarian economy. His country needs about five years to be able to do without Russian oil imports. An alternative would be supply via the Adriatic pipeline from Croatia.

The prime minister stressed that earlier the leaders of EU Member States had agreed that only such measures could be adopted that duly took account of the different energy structures of countries and the sovereign right to determine their own energy access. However, the President of the European Commission, “wittingly or unwittingly, attacked the hard-forged European unity”.

It makes no financial sense to change energy infrastructure

Orbán said those who have seas and ports are able to transport oil in tankers from any part of the world, but there are countries which do not have such options. Russian or any other oil can only be transported to Hungary via pipelines, “one end of the pipeline is in Russia, the other one is in Hungary,” that is a given, he explained, adding that Hungary was therefore unable to accept a proposal that disregards this circumstance.

“The fight that I’m fighting now is a fight to protect the Hungarian reduction of energy bills,” Orbán said, also mentioning that it would take years and investments worth hundreds of billions of forints to replace Russian oil with any other kind, while the transformation of the

Hungarian energy conveyance system would require further investments in the thousands of billions.

He said it would take five years to complete the necessary investments. Even if the EU provides funds for such purposes, “we only have that money on paper because they haven’t yet given it to us, and until they give us the money, we can’t start” that project.

Orban said at the same time it was well worth considering whether such a costly project that could only start functioning in 4 or 5 years’ time would make sense at all, given that the war was “taking place right now”.

He said if he saw a proposal that conformed to Hungarian interests, “then naturally, we’re happy to talk about it”. However, the proposal that is on the table now creates a Hungarian problem, and makes no proposal of any kind for solving that problem.

Orban made it clear that there would be a red line, namely, the energy embargo.

Arms supply supports war

By supplying arms, we move away from peace, rather than moving towards it, “those who supply arms also bring trouble onto themselves, in particular, if the country at war is your neighbour,” he argued.

The prime minister pointed out that the Hungarian community in the Ukrainian region of “Transcarpathia is now within firing range” because someone supplied or was about to supply weapons, and the Russians would destroy the transport nodes where such supplies can be offloaded or transported on.

Orban said he is planning to introduce the members of his new, significantly reshuffled government between 20 and 30 May. He indicated that there will be many and meaningful changes in response to the fact that many and meaningful changes have taken place in the world, too.

Hungary must reinforce its defence against the pressure of migration, he stated, adding that “the pandemic hasn’t gone away yet,” and the world is not prepared for a pandemic on such a scale, while there is also a war under way. “We must form a government which will be able to defend Hungary against these challenges,” Orban said.

EU Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** has meanwhile announced that she will travel to Budapest to talk to Orbán about security of supply in Hungary.

Hungary rejects sanctions against religious leaders

Hungary also rejected sanctions against religious leaders, the state secretary for aiding persecuted Christians told public television on Sunday, commenting on the European Union’s plan to sanction Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Tristan Azbej, who heads the Hungary Helps aid programme, said Hungary supported brokering peace and “sees counterproductive, nonsensical sanctions as harmful”.

The Russian Orthodox Church has some 160 million members and 40 000 priests worldwide, Azbej noted, adding that the EU’s “crazy” proposal would ban the patriarch from entering

the bloc, isolating religious people from their spiritual leader.

The Syrian orthodox patriarch, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the Hungarian eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, among others, have turned to Orban, “the last voice of Christianity and common sense in the EU”, regarding the European Commission’s proposal, which he said would create a dangerous precedent of “keeping other churches in check, and subjecting them to politically motivated sanctions”.

Hungary sees religious freedom as “sacred and inviolable”, and will not support sanctioning religious leaders, he said.

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