

Hungary-led Vetoes Against New EU Budget Further Fragments the Bloc's Unity

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Hungary, Poland and Slovenia have blocked the EU's budget and post-COVID recovery plan in order to oppose conditions that European aid must be connected to "respecting the rule of law." Budapest, which is leading the veto, blocked the budget after Prime Minister Viktor Orbán warned that he does not support the EU's attempts of linking the rule of law criterion to budgetary decisions.

Hungarian government spokesman Zoltán Kovács explained on [Twitter](#) that "we cannot support the plan in its present form to tie rule of law criteria to budget decisions." In fact, Hungary was fully aware that its veto would create a crisis in the EU, with Kovács [saying](#):

"[On] whether a Hungarian veto could lead to a crisis? I repeat: The burden of responsibility rests with those who have given rise to this situation in spite of Hungary's well-articulated stance."

With emphasis that Hungary is a "dedicated follower of the rule of law" that supports fellow EU Member States, Orbán also [explained](#) that Brussels only views "countries which let migrants in as those governed by the rule of law. Those who protect their borders cannot qualify as countries where rule of law prevails. Once this proposal gets adopted, there will be no more obstacles to tying member states' share of common funds to supporting migration and use financial means to blackmail countries which oppose migration."

Representatives of EU Member States were to vote on authorizing an increase in resources in order to finance the post-COVID economic recovery plan. However, this veto has delayed economic recovery in the EU as Orbán fears that the agreement could be weaponized against Hungary for its strong domestic anti-immigration position.

Germany, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Council until the end of 2020, is trying to find a compromise but is visibly not happy with the Orbán-led veto.

"We have already lost a lot of time in the face of the second wave of pandemics and the severe economic damage," said Michael Clauss, Germany's ambassador to the EU.

Clément Beaune, French Secretary of State for European Affairs, is optimistic though, assuring that a "solution will be found in the next few weeks."

However, the reality is that dialogue is broken and neither of the two camps want to give in.

It is likely that there is no possibility of concessions and it will be very difficult to find a solution. Frictions between Brussels and these three central European countries are not new. The crisis between the EU and Hungary even dates back to 2015 when there was a massive influx of migrants coming from Turkey to Central Europe via the Balkan route. This was the first sign of major polar differences within the EU.

On September 29, Orbán demanded the resignation of Věra Jourová, Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, after she publicly called Hungary a “sick democracy.” The next day, the Commission unveiled its first report on respect for [the Rule of Law](#) among the 27 EU Member States, singling out in particular Warsaw and Budapest, accusing them of undermining the independence of the judiciary.

The laborious negotiations on the stimulus plan also testify to these strong tensions. A compromise was reached on July 20 by all the member countries on the conditionality of granting European funds to respect democratic principles. This “respect for the rule of law” and mentions of a “conditionality regime,” without describing precisely how it would be applied, is highly problematic as it can be manipulated in many ways to serve an agenda. According to this provisional agreement, countries violating the rule of law could more easily lose their access to European funds.

This was contested by the Hungarian Justice Minister Judit Varga, who denounced the “political and ideological blackmail.” Janusz Kowalski, Polish Deputy Minister of State Treasury, was equally dramatic and [tweeted](#):

“VETO or DEATH! Symbol in the fight for Polish sovereignty against Eurocrats and German politicians who disobey European Union treaties.”

When Hungary, Poland and Slovenia joined the EU in 2004, there was no requirement on being open to illegal immigration. Rather, these are later political and ideological developments. However, two opposing conceptions of the EU have emerged and are unlikely going to compromise. Compromising “the rule of law” for the sake of good relations is a short-term policy bound to fail and a long-term strategic weakness.

However, it must also be remembered that [Hungary is one of five EU states that vetoed sanctions](#) against Turkey for, among many other things, orchestrating a migrant crisis on Greece’s borders in February and March of this year. In fact, in October 2019, Hungary frustrated the EU when it vetoed a draft text to warn the Turkish government that its Syrian operations could unleash another wave of refugees.

These continuous Hungarian vetoes for sanctions against Turkey are of course tied to its absorption into the Turkic sphere of influence, with the Central European country becoming an observer member of the Turkic Council in 2018. Hungary even opened a representative office of the Turkic Council in 2019. Orbán himself promotes the theory that Hungarians are “Kipchak Turks,” a Turkic tribe. Orbán even said that Hungary “is Christian Turkish lands” when speaking at the Hungarian Turan Foundation in March 2019 – Turan being a reference to a pan-Turkic motherland.

Therefore, Orbán’s claims that he is opposing the new budget because of his fear that the EU will force Hungary to accept illegal immigrants is extremely questionable. It is more likely that Orbán wants to maintain his grip on power that the EU says is in opposition to their

liberal values and Western interpretation of democracy. With this, he also has the support of Poland and Slovenia to oppose the EU's new budget, which will only descend the bloc into further fragmentation and disunity.

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