



Hungary

Assessment: Good

Trend: ↔

Capital: Budapest

Type of Government: Parliamentary Democracy

Head of Government: Prime Minister Peter

Medgyessy (since 27 May 2002)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Laszlo Kovacs

Population: 10,106,017

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 35

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite only modest international influence and economic resources, Hungary has a **good** record of support for democracy in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Balkans. The presence of over three million ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries, principally in Slovakia and the former Yugoslavia, is a major factor in Hungary's generally cautious foreign policy approach. The country exhibits a strong tendency to join with regional or global organizations when condemning threats to democracy in other countries. The Hungarian government has frequently cited the importance of democracy and strong democratic structures in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in other regions, to ensure security and stability. Within the international organizations to which it belongs, Hungary has actively worked on behalf of democracy promotion initiatives, condemned abusers of democratic principles, and supported efforts to bolster weak institutions in countries undergoing a democratic transition. Strengthening democracy abroad is cited as a priority in Hungary's 2002 foreign policy documents, and the 2003 budget will for the first time allocate funds in support of this goal -- clear evidence of the country's own successful transition to democracy, and its serious commitment to promoting democracy abroad.

FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Since the collapse of communism in 1990, Hungary's foreign policy has focused on integration into Western political and security structures. Joining the European Union (EU) and NATO were paramount objectives and were captured by the oft-heard slogan in Budapest, "Return to Europe." Hungary joined NATO in March 1999, and is currently a strong candidate for EU accession in January 2004. Overall, Hungarian foreign policy over the past decade has focused on European issues, and for the most part the country has had little ambition or means to engage in issues that extended beyond the region. It has, however, recognized the importance of its membership and activities in international fora, spanning the full spectrum: United Nations, Council of Europe, Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Visegrad Group, and the Central European Initiative. It also participates in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, a program financed and managed by the EU.

In addition to the EU, Hungary has taken a strong interest in developments in neighboring countries. As a result of the collapse of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, Hungary found itself in a dramatically different regional environment. In the first half of the 1990s, three countries that had bordered Hungary since 1945 -- Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia -- ceased to exist or dramatically changed their territorial shape. Apart from Austria and Romania, five of Hungary's seven neighbors, Slovakia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Ukraine, were new states. Throughout the 1990s, the country had to dedicate considerable resources and attention to establishing good relations with these countries.

A key factor in Budapest's diplomatic relations with its immediate neighbors is the large number of ethnic Hungarians living there, a legacy of Hungary's territorial losses following World Wars I and II.¹ Over



three million of its citizens now live in the surrounding countries.² Attending to the needs of Hungarian minorities abroad and monitoring the conduct of the respective governments on this issue has been one of the most important aims of the country's diplomatic efforts.

Security concerns have also occupied a prominent place in Hungarian foreign policy over the past ten years. The Yugoslav wars in the first half of the 1990s, the Kosovo crisis in the late 1990s, and recent turmoil in Macedonia have forced consecutive Hungarian governments to engage in considerable unilateral and multilateral efforts to try to restore peace and stability in the countries of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia.

RESPONSE TO THE OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

Between 1992 and 2002, there were no instances of the overthrow of a democratically elected government in Europe. Because the purview of Hungarian foreign policy typically does not extend beyond the region, the government has not taken any unilateral steps in response to coups in other regions of the world. But as an active member of many international organizations, Hungary has voiced its opposition to overthrows of democratic governments beyond Europe. In The Americas, for example, Hungary supported intervention by U.S. troops in Haiti to restore the ousted democratic regime (in compliance with the UN Security Council resolution), although Budapest did not have diplomatic relations with Haiti at the time of the coup and therefore did not issue any statements condemning it.³ When Jörg Haider's Freedom Party was incorporated into the Austrian government, Hungary had a tempered reaction. While sharing the concerns and unease expressed by the EU, Hungary wished to maintain bilateral relations with its neighbor and chose to see "what kind of political action the new Austrian Government will follow after entering into office" before taking any official action.⁴ After the coup in Pakistan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that his government was following the events in Pakistan closely and hoped for the immediate renewal of democratic institutions.⁵

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

The Hungarian government's response to electoral manipulation has almost always come in

cooperation with international organizations rather than in the form of unilateral actions. Hungary has joined the OSCE and Council of Europe in numerous missions to monitor elections, particularly within neighboring countries. A number of cases over the past decade tested Hungary's commitment to upholding democratic rule in the region. In keeping with its belief that democracy is the foundation for stability and security, the Hungarian government condemned the manipulation of elections in Serbia in 1996⁶ and 2000, and similarly sharply criticized electoral malpractice in Belarus in 1997.⁷ Hungary also publicly disapproved of widespread election irregularities under the Meciar government in Slovakia, though it declined to disrupt diplomatic relations because of ongoing concern about ethnic Hungarians in the country. Finally, Hungary joined statements issued by the Council of Europe and OSCE citing serious shortcomings in the 1998 Ukrainian elections.⁸

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Hungary has supported efforts to promote democracy undertaken by international organizations such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, and to a lesser extent, the forum of the Visegrad Group. Among the most important Hungarian initiatives has been the Szeged Process, named after a Hungarian city, where in October 1999 the Government of Hungary and the Stability Pact Special Coordinator pledged to work together to strengthen civil society in the FRY and to include Serbian democracy activists in the initiative. The program identified representatives of opposition-governed municipalities and independent media and linked them with European partners in an effort to reduce their isolation. The Szeged Process was carried out through a series of conferences geared to practical assistance measures, such as the provision of humanitarian and technical assistance, and creation of sister-city relationships.⁹

Since the end of communist rule, Hungary has received a comparatively generous amount of foreign aid to assist in fortifying domestic democratic institutions and reviving civil society. Twelve years later, having consolidated democratic rule, Hungary is drafting its own international development assistance strategy. Democracy promotion and institution building, focusing on Eastern Europe and the Balkans, are major elements of this strategy, which is slated to be announced



officially late in 2002. The 2003 federal budget will, for the first time, allocate funds for this new development policy, completing the country's evolution from recipient to donor.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

Over the past decade, Hungary has consistently criticized dictatorships and anti-democratic behavior across the Central and Eastern Europe region, the regimes of Lukashenko in Belarus and Milosevic in Yugoslavia coming in for the harshest treatment. Hungary has joined international efforts aimed at isolating these regimes, and took

part in the NATO operations against Milosevic. Hungary also supported EU sanctions against Belarus in 1998, as well as UN and EU sanctions against Yugoslavia during the 1990s.¹⁰

Concern over the ethnic Hungarian community in the FRY (as well as in Slovakia) compelled Budapest to adopt at least initially a somewhat less strident stance than it ordinarily might. Hungarian governments of varying political persuasions have felt they have to maintain a degree of engagement with these regimes to help ensure proper treatment for the ethnic Hungarian communities there.

¹ Political Developments Since 1989; Hungary; Foreign Policy. <www.europeanforum.bot-consult.se/cup/hungary/develop.htm>.

² Fowler, Brigid. Hungary's Neighbourhood Policies and Western Integration: Complementary or at Odds? Birmingham, England: University of Birmingham, 2001. Although numbers vary greatly, it is safely assumed that there are currently around 500,000 Hungarian in Slovakia, 160,000 in Ukraine, 1,600,000 in Romania, 300,000 in Yugoslavia, 22,000 in Croatia, 8,500 in Slovenia, and 33,000 in Austria.

³ "BBC Summary of World Broadcasts." British Broadcasting Corporation. 23 September 1994.

⁴ Government of Hungary. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Statement by Hungarian Foreign Minister János Martonyi on the Austrian Situation." Budapest, 2 February 2000. <http://www.mfa.gov.hu>.

⁵ Government of Hungary. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Summary in English of the Press Conference Delivered by the Spokesman on 13 Oct. 1999." Budapest, 13 October 1999. <http://www.mfa.gov.hu>.

⁶ Hungarian government statement on Serbian situation, Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Budapest, 12 January 1997.

⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. <www.infoukes.com/rfe-ukraine/1997/0908.html>.

⁸ European Forum. Newsletter/Calendar. No. 19. June 1998.

⁹ For more, see: www.stabilitypact.org.

¹⁰ For more, see the following information and analytical bulletin: www.openby/belarus-now.