

The Complexity of Hungarian-Romanian Relations in the European Union

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Abstract:

The paper presents the problem of complicated and difficult Romanian-Hungarian relations in Europe. Hungary and Romania, although both members of the EU and NATO, have completely different and opposing state doctrines in relation to the alliances to which they belong. Hungary wants to define itself, regardless of its membership in NATO and the EU, as an independent "power" at the intersection of the interests of the great powers (Berlin, Moscow and Istanbul). Despite belonging to the West, Hungarian foreign policy, especially under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, is characterized by a pragmatic, often controversial approach, maintaining close relations with authoritarian regimes and opposing mainstream EU policy. Romania's geostrategic position is crucial due to its location at the crossroads of Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, with direct access to the Black Sea and control over a significant part of the Danube. Romania pursues strongly pro-European and pro-NATO policies and is in a difficult strategic conflict with Hungary. This position gives it a central role in European security, transport and energy. A key conflict between Hungary and Romania is also the status of the Hungarian minority in Romania, which the Hungarian state has very successfully manipulated.

Keywords: Hungary, Romania, state doctrines, Hungarian minority in Romania.

Original Research

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1. INTRODUCTION

The paper deals with a significant and current topic that deals with the geostrategic Hungarian-Romanian conflict, with a special emphasis on the problems with the Hungarian minority in the Romanian nation-state that is politically loyal to Budapest. The aim of the paper is to present the geographical, strategic and geopolitical position of Romania and Hungary, which forms the basis of the analysis for understanding these states in a broader regional context. In this sense, the paper explores the following questions:

1. What is the Hungarian state doctrine in relation to the global environment?
2. What is the Romanian state doctrine in relation to the environment?
3. Compare the strategic differences between the states?
4. Investigate the position of the Hungarian national minority in Romania.

The methods we used in this research paper:

- The induction method as a type of indirect reasoning that, based on individual or specific facts, comes to a conclusion about a general judgment, i.e. from the observation of specific individual cases and facts, comes to general conclusions;
- The method of deduction as a form of indirect inference in which the conclusive judgment is derived from the general to the particular or individual;
- The method of analysis which refers to the breakdown of already known statements, propositions, concepts, conclusions, models, etc. into their constituent parts;
- The method of description which describes facts, concepts and processes.

2. HUNGARY'S GEOSTRATEGIC POSITION

Hungary's geostrategic position is defined by its Central European location, membership in Western alliances (EU and NATO), and its efforts to position itself as an independent "power" at the crossroads of the interests of the great powers (Berlin, Moscow, and Istanbul). Despite its affiliation with the West, Hungarian foreign policy, especially under the leadership of Viktor Orbán since 2010, has been characterized by a pragmatic, often controversial approach, maintaining close relations with authoritarian regimes, and opposing mainstream EU policy. Hungary is located in the center of the Carpathian Basin, which has historically given it both advantages and weaknesses. Its inland location and flat terrain (the Pannonian Plain) facilitate communication and transport within the country, and rivers such as the Danube provide important transport routes. Although it does not have direct access to the sea, Hungary has a strong tradition of fighting for national sovereignty and influence in the region, especially in relation to neighboring countries with Hungarian minorities, which it skillfully uses for its own national and state interests. The main transport routes of the Pan-European Transport Corridor V (which stretches from Italy to Ukraine, with two branches from Croatia) and the Pan-European Transport Corridor VII (the Danube, which connects Germany with the Black Sea) pass through Hungary. Corridor V passes through Budapest and has branches connecting Croatia, while Corridor VII is a water corridor that also passes through Hungary.

Pan-European Transport Corridor V: This land corridor connects Venice (Italy) and Kiev (Ukraine) via Budapest. The Hungarian part of the corridor is crucial for connecting north and south and east and west. Two branches from Croatia, one from Rijeka and one from Ploče, join the main route in Hungary and near Budapest. **Pan-European Transport Corridor VII:** This is a water corridor that runs along the Danube. It passes through several countries, including Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, connecting to the Black Sea. An important point in Hungary on this corridor is the city of Jura (Papić, M.,: Pan-European Transport Corridor., 2022.). The importance of Hungary's geostrategic position, relates to the major powers analyzed below.

2.1. United States of America and NATO

Hungary is a member of NATO, but its relations with the US and other Western partners are strained, especially due to its rapprochement with authoritarian regimes. There are calls within NATO to increase engagement and investment in the region in order to strengthen transatlantic ties. After years of coordinated post-communist political and economic reforms, Hungary is an active member of NATO and the European Union, and was an extremely close ally from 2004-2010. of the United States. However, as in the rest of the Central European region, Hungary's relations with Western institutions are under severe stress. Russia and China are competing for Hungary's attention, and concerns about the country's rule of law and economic insecurity are straining transatlantic ties. The United States needs to increase engagement and investment in the region to help Hungary move forward (Atlantic Council, Hungarian State Position Report; <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/region/hungary/>. 10/19/2025).

2.2. European Union

Hungary is a full member of the EU, but has been in a long-standing conflict with the EU institutions. Viktor Orbán's government frequently opposes joint EU decisions, uses its veto and provokes Brussels with rhetoric that undermines the EU's credibility. Due to its rule of law violations, Hungary faces a reduction in EU funds. From a geopolitical perspective, Hungary has distanced itself from the EU's categorization of China as a 'strategic rival', which it sees as a fatal mistake that will only exacerbate the region's economic challenges. It has refused to support a complete break with Russia. It did not support the EU sanctions program and did not agree to contribute to the supply of weapons to Ukraine, citing both factors as key catalysts for the continuation, rather than the prevention, of the conflict. Hungary has lost its right to EU aid worth around one billion euros due to rule of law violations, as reforms were supposed to be implemented by the end of 2024, a European Commission spokeswoman confirmed to dpa (https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-countries/hungary_hr_20.10.2025).

2.3. Russia

Hungary maintains close relations with Russia despite Russia's aggression in Ukraine,

which has drawn criticism from its EU and NATO partners. Viktor Orbán has repeatedly stressed that he does not want to pay for "someone else's war" and that sanctions against Russia are damaging the European economy. Hungary uses its relations with Russia to secure energy supplies (EU Reporter, British Debating Club in Ireland; <https://www.eureporter.co/world/hungary/2025/05/01/hungarys-geopolitical-renavigation-a-new-reality/> accessed: 15.10.2025).

2.4. China

Hungary welcomes Chinese investments and does not consider China a strategic rival, in contrast to the mainstream view of the EU. China sees Hungary as an entry point for investments in the EU, and the Hungarian government uses these economic ties as a means of geopolitical maneuvering (EU reporter, British debate club in Ireland

<https://www.eureporter.co/world/hungary/2025/05/01/hungarys-geopolitical-renavigation-a-new-reality/>. 20.10.2025). The Hungarian state doctrine aims for Hungary to be a key-strategic state in the EU, due to the desire that as a "key-state", it plays a role, a role that allows it to balance between the great powers (East and West) in order to maximize its own autonomy and benefit (<https://thegeopolitics.com/hungarys-keystone-gamble-balancing-east-and-west-in-a-multipolar-world/>. 19.10.2025) Hungarian geostrategic foreign policy goals are (<https://www.dw.com/sr/nova-ma%C4%91arska-geostrate%C5%A1ka-pozicija/a-44742880>. 19.10.2025), ([https://atti.unimiskolc.hu/segedianyog/GeopolofHungary_Lakat osJulia2025.pdf](https://atti.unimiskolc.hu/segedianyog/GeopolofHungary_Lakat%20osJulia2025.pdf). 19.10. 2025);

1. Achieving autonomy: After centuries of domination by major powers, Hungary's main geopolitical goal is to achieve as much autonomy as possible.

2. Regional leadership: Hungary seeks to gain influence in the Central European region, which sometimes leads to tensions with neighbors, for example over resource exploitation or the rights of Hungarian minorities.

3. "Opening Eastward": A foreign policy based on pragmatism and national interest, which allows for cooperation with authoritarian regimes (China, Serbia, Russia).

Hungary's new state doctrine, which is based on a strategic predestination in balancing East and West and a new Eastern opening, has its own obstacles and challenges, including:

1. Rule of law: Conflict with the EU over respect for democratic norms and rules.

2. Economic vulnerability: Financial instability and delays in EU funds payments put pressure on the government.

3. Relations with Ukraine: Close relations with Russia and a critical attitude towards arming Ukraine create serious tensions. Encouraging the Hungarian minority in Ukraine to resist the official authorities.

In short, Hungary's geostrategic position is complex, characterized by balancing between geopolitical blocs, which gives it tactical advantages, but also carries the risk of isolation and conflict within the EU and NATO. Hungary cultivates strange anti-European alliances with Serbia, Russia, China and other anti-European regimes and does not fit into the NATO and EU system.

3. ROMANIA'S GEOSTRATEGIC POSITION

Romania's geostrategic position is crucial due to its location at the crossroads of Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, with direct access to the Black Sea and control over a significant part of the Danube. This position gives it a central role in European security, transport and energy. The key elements of the geostrategic position are (Croatian Encyclopedia: Romania; <https://enciklopedija.hr/clanak/rumunjska>. 20.10.2025):

Access to the Black Sea: The Black Sea is a key area of geostrategic rivalry between NATO and Russia, and Romania has one of the most important roles in the region. Its port of Constanța is the largest on the Black Sea and is an important link for global trade.

Danube Link: Romania controls more than 30% of the Danube, one of Europe's most important waterways. This connects it to the Rhine River and the interior of Europe, making it an important logistical hub.

Position on the eastern wing of NATO: As a member of NATO, Romania is located on the border with the increasingly unstable region of Eastern Europe. Its strong security partnership with the USA and its key role in the defense of the Eastern wing of the Alliance are recognized as crucial for European security, but also the possibility of Romania's repositioning in the big

regional picture, especially after the possible unification with Moldova.

Energy transit: Romania lies at the crossroads of energy transit corridors. With access to offshore resources and interconnection pipelines, it has the potential to become a leading energy producer in Europe.

3.1. Geopolitical significance in the context of the war in Ukraine

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has further highlighted the geostrategic importance of Romania. Romania is a strong NATO military stronghold. Romania currently has a squadron of F-16 aircraft and a small number of Patriot air defense systems, HIMARS launchers, and Turkish and Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The modest Romanian Navy has 6,500 personnel and is based in Constanta, the largest EU port on the Black Sea, and in Mangalia near the Bulgarian coast. Since 2015, the US Aegis ballistic missile defense system has been deployed at the Romanian air base in Deveselu. Romania has provided significant support to Ukraine, including the donation of Patriot air defense systems, further strengthening Ukraine's defenses. Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base (MKAB) in Romania, after February 24, 2022. MK became the easternmost NATO location, with troops flown in from almost all NATO countries. The Allied Forces Battle Group is under the full control of the French military leadership (US NATO-A military base in Romania:

<https://home.army.mil/blacksea/about/visitors>. 10/20/2025).

Due to geographical proximity and historical ties, Russia remains the main point of strategic defense in Romania. Attacks on ships in Romania's exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea highlight the need to resolve the conflict with Russia. Despite the energy potential, its realization will require investment in infrastructure, in order to become a regional gas leader that can displace Russian gas from Moldova and other states dependent on the Turkish Stream. Romania's national interest is to strengthen regional cooperation, especially with neighboring Moldova, helping it in European integration and combating Russian influence. The Three Seas Initiative, in which Romania is very active, is a platform for strengthening infrastructure between the Adriatic,

Baltic and Black Seas, which further emphasizes its regional importance.

4. HUNGARY-ROMANIA STRATEGIC CONFLICT IN TRANSYLVANIA

Romania has extremely problematic and complex relations with Hungary, mainly due to the fact that a large number of members of the Hungarian national community live in central Romania, mainly located in Transylvania, that is, in Transylvania (Hungarian). According to the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 1,002,200 members of the Hungarian national community live on Romanian state territory, so that the Hungarian minority makes up 6 percent of the population (<https://insse.ro/cms/en>. 12.3.2025). The Peace Treaty of Trianon at the end of World War I (1920) meant, among other things, the unification of Transylvania, Banat, i.e. all areas within the Carpathians, with Romania, which also meant a deterioration in relations between the two countries. All these areas before World War I were part of the great and powerful Hungary. The infamous communist regime of Romanian President Ceaușescu restricted the use of minority languages, gradually reducing their cultural and political infrastructure.

By joining the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations, Romania has committed itself to respecting the rights of minorities, including the Hungarian minority. After the European integrations of Romania and Hungary, the Hungarian minority in Romania could not achieve any results, in the case of broad territorial autonomy, proposed by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania [Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség, RMDSZ] (<https://rmdsz.ro/dokumentumok>. 11.3.2025). Romanian governments, regardless of their political orientation, have vehemently rejected such proposals, with the clear argument that such a proposal destroys the territorial and political unity of the nation and state.

Romania is consistent in its Euro-Atlantic doctrine and integration into the EU and NATO and is extremely friendly towards America, while Hungary has a tone of Euroscepticism, pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian rhetoric, criticizing the centralization of the EU as well as the defense policy of the EU and America. Hungary is constantly criticized by the EU regarding the issue of immigrants, which has been intensifying since

2015, while Romania receives absolute support for its consistent and strict war on corruption. Hungary wants to achieve a privileged position on the huge Russian market, and wants to realize its policy of "eastern opening" of the market towards Turkic-speaking countries and of course towards Russia. Romania, however, based on its negative experiences from the past, is very reserved regarding the new Russian expansionism and the brutal Russian aggression against Ukraine, which seems to end with a Russian victory. Therefore, Romania wants to conduct its foreign and defense policy with the United States and NATO. It is also an active initiator of collective defense on the eastern edge of NATO. Hungarian far-right political circles have very close relations with the Russian intelligence service, structures based on territorial revisionism and rejection of Western-type democracies (Juhász A., Győri L., Zgut E., Dezső A., 2017).

This can very quickly destabilize Romanian-Hungarian relations, since Romanians have the unpleasant experience of large and frequent territorial losses during World War I and II. The Hungarian "eastern opening" of Orbán's pro-Russian government can easily revive Romanians' suspicions of Hungarian irredentism and extremism, which in this current geopolitical and geo-economic situation is trying to gain Russian support to achieve its great-state goals. According to research by the Hungarian Bálványos Institute in Romania (<https://balvanyos.org/en/>, 11.3.2025), located in Cluj-Napoca, the majority of the Romanian population considers the party of Romanian Hungarians RMDSZ a "retrograde" force that hinders the development of the country, politically loyal to Budapest, and in a broader context a party that supports the new Russian imperialism, which is extremely sensitive for the majority population. RMDSZ, i.e. Hungarians participate in Romanian public life through an ethnic party and do not vote for left-wing and liberal Romanian parties. The next "controversial stone" is the Hungarian use of symbols and language, which especially in relation to Szeklerland (Szekely, in Croatian also: Sikuli, Sekelji or Szekleri, Hungarian: székelyek (singular: székely), Romanian Secuii (singular: Secui) is the name for the regional community of Hungarians settled mainly in the eastern parts of Transylvania, in the Romanian counties of Covasna, Harghita and Mureș, <https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sekelji> 10.3.2025),

seems irritating to the majority, since this is the area where Hungarian regional elements are most clearly present, in otherwise homogeneous Hungarian settlements and often appear in public spaces. The problem could also be that the Hungarian minority somewhat avoids the language of the majority Romanian people. RMDSZ consciously directs Hungarians towards an "extremist" position and, together with Orbán's national policy, undermines Romania's sovereignty, is the conclusion of a very detailed research by the Hungarian Institute from Cluj-Napoca on the relationship between the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority (<https://balvanyos.org/en/anti-hungarian-attitudes-in-romania/> 11.3.2025).

5. COMPARISON OF HUNGARIAN AND ROMANIAN STATE DOCTRINE TOWARDS THE EU AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

Although both countries are in the EU, NATO and Schengen and are closest neighbors, they pursue completely opposite policies towards the associations they belong to, their closest neighbors and their attitude towards the war in Ukraine.

5.1 HUNGARY-STRATEGIC POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

STRATEGIC POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

Anti-European Policy /Since 2011.

Anti-Nato Policy /Since 2020.

Anti-Croatian Policy / Since 2013.¹

Anti-Romania Policy /Since 2005 to 2017.²

Anti-Ukrainian Policy /Since 2022.

Anti-Slovak Policy /Since 2008-2022.³

Tactical Alliance With Slovakia /From 2022

Strategic Partnership With Serbia /From 2015

Strategic Partnership With Russia /From 2012

Strategic Partnership With China/ From 2015

Strategic Partnership With Turkey /From 2023

¹ A Hungarian oil company MOL, with the help of the Hungarian government, illegally took over the Croatian oil company INA. Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader was sentenced to a single 15-year prison sentence for numerous corrupt acts, mainly related to INA.

² Hungarian state policy is blocking Romania's entry into the OECD, allegedly due to harassment of the Hungarian minority.

³ Hungarian chauvinists blocked the Slovakian-Hungarian border in 2008, allegedly due to pressure on the Hungarian minority by the Slovak government.

5.2. ROMANIA- STRATEGIC POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

STRATEGIC POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

PRO-EUROPEAN POLICY /SINCE 2007

PRO-NATO POLICY /SINCE 2004

PRO-UKRAINIAN POLICY /SINCE 2022

PRO-AMERICAN POLICY /SINCE 2004

POSITIVE REGIONAL COOPERATION-
BLACK SEA SINCE 1992⁴

POSITIVE REGIONAL COOPERATION
EU-BLACK SEA SINCE 2007⁵

6. CONCLUSION

Hungarian-Romanian relations in the EU are very complex and inflammatory. Hungary is in today's current times, a disruptive factor in the EU, NATO and world security. Such a state doctrine has been implemented by Hungarian Prime Minister V. Orban since 2011 as a Russian Trojan horse, which destabilizes all neighbors and European Union policy, primarily because of cheap Russian gas and the great-power ambitions of official Budapest, which manipulates the Hungarian minority in Romania, but also in Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia and Ukraine. Romania has proven to be a reliable ally of NATO and the EU, and provides full support to Ukraine in the imposed war. The Hungarian national minority in Romania should be oriented towards the Romanian state, and not be politically and economically loyal to Budapest. Romania also makes excellent use of its position as the master of the Danube and connecting transport corridors to Central and Northern Europe.

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⁴ The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation - BSEC (Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation) was founded on June 25, 1992. Romania is a very important factor.

⁵ EU Black Sea Synergy. A bottom-up approach to project development Launched in 2007, the Black Sea Synergy encourages a bottom-up approach to project development, identifying and supporting the needs, priorities and aims of partners in the region, and what they want to do together. Romania is a very important factor.

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