



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Orbán's veto will exclude Hungary from EU decision-making



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has no intention of giving up his bargaining game with the EU institutions and testing the limits of its patience. Over time, his style has grown into a state strategy. And as long as the tension is reduced to the level of Brussels and Budapest, both sides somehow cope with the problems. But when the EU, as a whole, cannot achieve its strategic foreign policy goals because of Orbán's veto, it then becomes a problem for the remaining 26 member states.

On December 6, the Hungarian government blocked an 18 billion euros aid package intended for Ukraine. In order for European money to reach the people of Ukraine, whose fight against Russian aggression they wholeheartedly support, Brussels will have to look for manoeuvring space following Orbán's veto. It hopes to accomplish this by January 2023, when billions of euros of support is planned to arrive in Kyiv.

Orbán's unprecedented move is, in fact, his blackmailing the EU to release about 7.5 billion euros from European funds, which it had previously frozen as a punishment for widespread corruption in Hungary. All other explanations given by Orbán and the people in his government are excuses for what they actually did. Although they say that they will send money directly to Kiev, to the equivalent of the amount Hungary owes to contribute to the overall European package, Orbán has actually stood in the way of joint European action to help Ukraine. He created a road block, and demanded that passage be paid for.

The EU's patience is at an end

The EU tried everything, or almost everything, to bring Hungary's behaviour within the framework of jointly adopted rules, values and legislation. For years political pressure has been exerted on Budapest to eliminate high level corruption, to change its laws on human rights and freedoms, not to deviate from common European values, and to join the common front of resistance against Putin and his policy towards Ukraine. That was not enough. When threatened with financial

penalties, Orbán responded with direct blackmail. Not to the detriment of the EU, or Hungary, but Ukraine, experiencing its most difficult days.

After Orbán's veto on the aid package to Ukraine, the EU has been left with only one solution. To abolish the principle of consensus on key foreign policy decisions and to reach decisions by the majority of member states, or at least the principle of 26 votes (consensus minus Hungary) so that its foreign policy could function at all.

This change has been referred to solely as a "heavy weapon" that Europeans are reluctant to use.

"On foreign affairs, I'm deeply convinced that it is not sustainable, that the European Union is not able to take a position because of one blocking in critical areas. And the speed at which things happen...the world wants to hear the European voice. The speed is too high to constantly, or too often, not be heard and seen, because of the blocking of one party. Therefore there, I'm really convinced we need qualified majority voting," Ursula von der Leyen told Politico in June.

Orbán destroyed the principle of equality in the EU

Because of Orbán, the EU's principle of consensus in decision-making has lost its original idea for the voice of the "big" and the voice of the "small" to have equal importance. With his politics, he nullified it, turning it into a mechanism for blackmail. This will only speed up the EU transformation from a club of equals into an organisation where decisions will be made by the majority. This is a path that has been advocated for a long time by the most influential members, above all France and Germany.

On the other hand, Orbán's veto policy directly harms Hungary itself, regardless of his recent re-election victory. Hungarian citizens are traditionally very pro-EU oriented, which is

completely out of line with their government's policy. Not so long ago, at the end of 2020, a record 85% of Hungarians said they supported their country's membership of the EU (Median Institute for Public Opinion and Market Research).

Even in terms of trust in European institutions, Hungarians are at the top of the European league, where with 56% of support, it is equal with Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark (EC Eurobarometer 2021). And almost two-thirds of Hungarians - about 62% - still have the fundamental values of the EU at heart - the promotion of peace, democratic values and economic progress.

Orbán's policy of destruction, which over time has turned into a policy of blackmailing the EU, not only causes irreparable damage to the EU and its foreign policy, but also to Hungary itself, which persistently repeats that it wants to share togetherness in the Union and not to be left out of it. Ignoring Hungary's voice in important European decisions would therefore be difficult, but would be the only effective reminder to Hungarians that they have a government that does not represent their desire to truly belong to the European community.