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Prime Minister (PM) Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party has been in power for 14 years, winning a supermajority in every election since 2010. The ruling party's power is based on its hegemonic position politically, legally, institutionally, financially and publicly, including a constitutional majority, a [tailor-made electoral system](#), [state capture](#), and [control of public discourse](#), making its rule so far unchallengeable domestically. Thus, national elections have minor stakes for Fidesz, turning the regime's attention to its international environment and making it the main playing field. The [overarching goal](#) of PM Orbán is to bring about a "regime change" in the European Union (EU) by dismantling the dominance of the current mainstream elites and shifting the EU towards a "Europe of Nations" to create a favourable external environment for his regime's long-term domestic persistence.

Having a large presence in the European Parliament (EP) plays a part in this effort. Out of the 21 seats assigned to Hungary, Fidesz has the largest delegation in the current EP, with 12 MEPs, and one MEP from its satellite Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). While Fidesz's MEPs have been non-attached since the party was forced to leave the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) in 2021, KDNP's sole MEP managed to remain in the EPP group. To strengthen its position, the Orbán regime has been [building influence](#) across the West, forming alliances and partnerships with like-minded "sovereignist" parties in almost every EU member state, based on the similarities in ideology, policy or interests.

Based on these relationships, Fidesz wants to build the broadest possible coalition of radical right and populist radical right parties, currently spread between the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) political groups in the EP, with a view to securing more influence in the EU. However, a united group seems unlikely to materialise, as these parties differ over several key issues, prominently the war in Ukraine. Even Fidesz [admitted](#) this by [signalling](#) its desire to join the ECR to somewhat ease its isolation in autumn 2023.

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What the campaign was supposed to be about

Although the official campaign for the European Parliament and local elections in Hungary only began on April 20th, this made little difference, as the ruling Fidesz party has kept the country in a state of permanent political campaigning for the past 14 years. The reason for this is that, besides the legal and institutional framework, Fidesz’s power **relies** heavily on the manipulation of information, and the formulation of internal and external enemies to shift the blame and incite and exploit anger and fear. Using hostile **disinformation narratives** based on the Kremlin’s playbook, Fidesz portrays independent domestic actors such as the free press, NGOs, think tanks, academics, and opposition politicians as foreign agents that are funded by Western globalist elites (e.g. George Soros) to drag Hungary into the war in Ukraine, open the borders to illegal immigrants and poison children’s minds with gender propaganda. Fidesz also planned to focus on these messages in the current campaign, wrapped in a **Eurosceptic** sovereigntist “grand” narrative.

The “anti-Brussels” rhetoric has been a prominent feature of the Orbán regime’s permanent campaigning over the past decade and was supposed to be **central to Fidesz’s agenda** for the 2024 EP elections. Fidesz claims that Hungary’s sovereignty is being threatened by the EU, which it portrays as an “empire” and compares to the Soviet Union. Another **key narrative** is that “European leftist pro-war politicians”, such as Ursula von der Leyen, Manfred Weber or Emmanuel Macron, want to start “World War III” by sending weapons and soldiers to Ukraine, while “conservative”, “sovereigntist” forces, **led by Fidesz**, want to end the war and advocate alone **for a ceasefire** and peace talks. According to Fidesz’s message, **this year’s EP elections** are about sovereigntist forces fighting against globalist elites to **occupy Brussels** in order to return the West to “normality”, end the war in Ukraine, save farmers and the economy, stop migration and protect families and children from re-education.

How the campaign has gone off the rails for both Fidesz and the opposition

Despite the government’s **dominant position** in the public arena, Fidesz’s pre-planned Eurosceptic election campaign was washed away by two major scandals that have **rocked** the government since February.

The first was the so-called “**presidential pardon scandal**”, which shook a **fundamental element** of the **regime’s identity**, the protection of children, and forced the resignation of President Katalin Novák and former Justice Minister Judit Varga, MP, for pardoning a person with close ties to the regime’s highest circles who had been convicted of covering up a child sexual abuse case. Varga was replaced by the much less popular MEP Tamás Deutsch as the lead candidate of Fidesz’s EP list.

The scandal seemed to end by late February, but then a **new player emerged**. The ex-husband of former Justice Minister Varga, Péter Magyar stepped into the limelight and accused the regime’s second most influential person, Cabinet Minister Antal Rogán, of serious

abuse of power. Using his image as a regime insider, Magyar captured the attention of [voters dissatisfied](#) with established opposition parties and launched a new movement and then a party (TISZA) to run in the elections. Leading TISZA's EP list, Magyar [campaigns against](#) further European integration, criticising especially the EU's rule of law mechanism. Nevertheless, his TISZA party seeks membership of the EPP if elected.

Despite Fidesz's massive counter-campaign to discredit Magyar both personally and politically, the ruling party has been on the defensive since early February, unable to take control of the political agenda and focus on its pre-planned "occupy Brussels" campaign.

However, Magyar's sudden rise has not only disrupted Fidesz's plans, but also those of the highly fragmented opposition parties. Capitalising on the dissatisfaction with the democratic opposition parties that [cooperated in the 2022 national elections](#), Magyar's TISZA party has mainly attracted voters from them and from undecided voters who could have been a reserve for both the opposition and Fidesz. Thus, within a few weeks, the TISZA party became the largest opposition party and completely restructured the opposition landscape. Parties that were previously seen as possible relative winners in the EP elections are now fighting for relevance, and some even for seats.

The situation of the democratic opposition is complicated by the fact that it is pursuing two different strategies for the [two elections](#) taking place on June 9th. For the EP elections, their main goal is to clarify the power hierarchy among them in preparation for the 2026 parliamentary elections, so they are competing against one another rather than against Fidesz. In the local elections, however, they (would have had to) field joint or coordinated candidates to compete with Fidesz. This has complicated negotiations between them, increased dissatisfaction and created confusion among voters, which was precisely Fidesz's intention in holding the two elections on the same day.

The former largest opposition party, the Democratic Coalition (DK; S&D group), is leading a joint three-party list led by MEP Klára Dobrev and including the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and Budapest mayor Gergely Karácsony's party, Dialogue (*Párbeszéd*). Their [campaign](#) is focused on opposing PM Orbán, aiming to topple the regime with a snap election if the EP elections see Fidesz's support fall. The liberal Momentum party (Renew Europe) is fielding a separate EP list, led by MEP and party leader, Anna Donáth. Their main campaign messages have so far focused on "[being the most active Hungarian party in the EP](#)" and getting [direct EU funding](#) to Hungarian civil society and municipalities, despite the rule of law deficiencies in Hungary. The former extreme right, now mainstream right-wing *Jobbik* party will likely lose its only MEP.

Apart from them, two parties will have some chance to gain mandates in the EP: The extreme-right Our Homeland (*Mi Hazánk*), and the anti-establishment, extra-parliamentary Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP). *Mi Hazánk's* leading candidate is MP and party leader László Toroczkai, who aims to join the Identity and Democracy (ID) group if elected to the EP. Based on a wide range of conspiracy theories, the

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party [campaigns](#) against further European integration in order to protect Hungary from the “anti-national ideological interest network of Brussels”. MKKP’s [campaign](#) focuses on anti-corruption and improving citizens’ participation in EU politics, while promising to redistribute funds for its MEPs to local community projects in Hungary. MKKP’s leading candidate is Marietta Le, an expert on civic participation, who could join the Greens/EFA group if elected.

Potential results of the elections

Hungary is in political turmoil ahead of the European and local elections on June 9th. Since February, the Orbán government has been hit by the biggest political scandals of the last decade and a new player is shaking up the political field. These developments have completely reset the election campaign, revived national politics and overshadowed Fidesz’s anti-Brussels messages. As the political situation is highly volatile, and opinion poll results vary widely, it remains difficult to predict the outcome of the EP elections.

Although Fidesz’s support has declined since June 2022, especially since the presidential pardon scandal in February, it is still by far the strongest party, with the support of 42% of those willing to vote with a [party preference](#). Thus, the default scenario is that Fidesz will get the majority of Hungary’s 21 seats, and the opposition will remain in a state of disarray, unable to cooperate effectively. This could solidify Fidesz’s hegemony in the Hungarian political sphere, cooling down the almost revolutionary sentiments among some voters.

Alternatively, Fidesz could fall below 40% and lose the majority of Hungary’s EP seats, leading to a revival and reshaping of the opposition, especially if TISZA fares well. The uncertainty is in the prospect of Péter Magyar’s movement and its ability to institutionalise. It will likely prove difficult for his movement to build a national network of politicians and activists while keeping up the revolutionary mood and retaining the public’s attention until the 2026 general elections.

Hegemon in Hungary, isolated in Europe

On the European stage, Hungary’s stance will remain unchanged. The Orbán regime will aim to ease its international isolation and improve its room for manoeuvre. To achieve this, Fidesz will try to join the [ECR group](#) or form [a larger radical-right group](#) on the basis of the ECR and ID, while its satellite party, the KDNP, will remain hidden in the EPP. If Fidesz were to join the ECR without the departure of parties that have expressed their opposition, such as the Sweden Democrats, the Finns Party, the Latvian National Alliance, the Belgian New Flemish Alliance, the Czech Civic Democratic Party and the Slovak Freedom and Solidarity, it could make the group [the third largest](#) in the EP. This certainly gives ECR leader Giorgia Meloni a strong motivation to support Fidesz’s entry into the group, which is also favoured by the group’s second largest delegation, Poland’s Law and Justice party. Whether the internal opposition can be overcome will probably depend on Fidesz’s concessions regarding its pro-Kremlin and anti-Ukraine stance,

other possible inter-group movements, and the overall outcome of the elections. Membership of the ECR group could then further moderate Fidesz's current pro-Kremlin and anti-Ukraine rhetoric to conform to the group's stance.

The Orbán regime might hope to regain some goodwill in Europe during Hungary's EU Council presidency in the second half of 2024. The Orbán government will aim for a smooth, non-controversial, and technocratic presidency while using the symbolic power of the presidency to promote its views and advance the messages of the anti-establishment and sovereigntist forces. Nevertheless, if the current power relations prevail, Hungary will likely continue drifting towards and remaining on the EU's periphery, becoming a pariah state within the EU without major strategic allies. This is why Viktor Orbán will be closely watching the Austrian parliamentary elections and the German regional elections in the autumn, hoping that more of his allies will join national governments or reshape domestic politics. And that is why PM Orbán is banking on Donald Trump's return to the US presidency, which could give another big boost to European sovereigntist forces.

