

The War Paradox: As Hungary's  
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## Abstract

Recent media in Western circles has been quick to translate Hungary's reluctance to engage with the War in Ukraine to the extent of its allies into a general critique of Hungary's flagging support for NATO and European collective defense. While the former is no secret, the latter misattributes the Hungarian government's rationale and ignores the real benefits inherent to the paradox of Hungarian views on conflict: while Hungary's leaders rail against further involvement in war, the defense industry continues to reach new heights of growth and modernization. While easy to write off one element or the other as disingenuous (as defenders and critics might do), this report argues that the truth is more complicated. Indeed, both Hungary's reluctance to more actively engage in Ukraine and its commitment to increase military spending, equipment production, and modernization lend credence to a nuanced view of Hungarian actions as the balance of ultimately pro-Western orientation translated through a national sovereignty-focused or "sovereigntist" lens. Though Hungarian leaders frequently criticize what they see as enforced unanimity in EU and NATO collective decision-making that downplays national concerns, Hungary's real contributions to collective European security and its steady, though often oblique support for Ukraine are an asset to both organizations and demonstrate that even in dissent, Hungarian leaders are still committed to defending the European community.

**Keywords:** *Hungary, NATO, Defense Industry, European Security, Ukraine*

## Introduction

*Threats and challenges arising from this changing security environment necessitate the maintaining of close transatlantic ties, as well as the improvement of the defence capabilities of European states...Transatlantic cooperation, in accordance with Article 3 of the Washington Treaty (developing national capabilities), is based on the coordinated development of allied forces and ensures the credibility of the collective defence enshrined in Article 5 of the Treaty through the continued interoperability, readiness and combat readiness of national forces.<sup>1</sup>*

This statement did not come from a US report from the Pentagon, nor from any NATO strategic concepts, nor even from the recent EU strategic compass, although the themes are

strikingly similar. Rather, this quotation comes from Hungary's National Military Strategy, passed by resolution in 2021. The document discusses at length threats and challenges plaguing the security environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It calls for increased resilience in the cyber and space domains accompanying modernization, interoperability, and defense industry revitalization.<sup>2</sup> The strategy coincides with a metamorphosis of Hungary's defense force posture underway for nearly a decade. Through these efforts, most notably the Zrínyi Program inaugurated in 2017, Hungary has been flexing its defense industry muscles at a time when Europe desperately needs to rearm itself.

Perplexingly, however, this buildup comes at a time when Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán is broadcasting a vastly different political message. Even as new Hungarian factories churn out everything from small arms to self-propelled howitzers, Orbán casts himself and his Fidesz party as pro-peace while condemning the US and EU for dragging Europe towards war over Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Orbán has previously obstructed EU aid to Ukraine and efforts to sanction Moscow, and has even sought to formally prevent future Hungarian participation in NATO activities beyond alliance borders.<sup>4</sup> The apparent paradox sets the stage for an interesting question: To what end, then, is Hungary so vigorously revitalizing its defense forces?

## Bold Leaps

Some of this growth and development was inevitable. From the 1990s to the 2010s, Hungary's defense capabilities languished even as the country joined NATO in 1999 and the EU shortly after in 2004. Manpower fell rapidly from 155,700 in 1989 to 61,500 in 1998, and then further to 25,257 by 2009.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, remaining equipment could only be modernized sporadically and on a platform-by-platform basis. These efforts were mostly relegated to major combat systems such as the MiG-29 fighter aircraft, T-72 main battle tank, and Mistral MANPAD air defense system.<sup>6</sup> Extensive force development, meanwhile, had not taken place in the Hungarian Defense Forces (HDF) since the fall of communism in 1989. Efforts in the 2000s had stalled, and while the emerging war on terror created new impetus for development, the conflict emphasized "smaller, peacemaker, peacekeeper, and high readiness capabilities instead of conventional or territorial defense forces."<sup>7</sup>

Even so, the Hungarian government's about-face on defense in the past decade has been monumental. In financial terms alone, Hungarian defense expenditures jumped from 1.2 billion USD to 5 billion USD between 2014 and 2023. Even adjusting for inflation, the budget grew by nearly 3 billion USD. Moreover, in 2023 Hungary successfully met the 2% NATO spending goal for the first time since joining the alliance.<sup>8</sup> In the same period, Hungary also exceeded the NATO guideline of earmarking 20% of defense expenditures for equipment expenditures. In 2014, Hungary only spent about 7.75% on equipment, but by 2023 this number had spiked to 48.4%, the fourth highest among all of NATO.<sup>9</sup> This spending category also represents R&D expenditures; further highlighting Hungary's modernization commitment. These figures place Hungary alongside regional neighbors and those bordering Russia such as Poland, Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania. Defense Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky highlighted this growth in a recent defense summit in May 2024, which he tied to the change in government in 2010, when Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party came to power.<sup>10</sup>

Much of this expansion is industrial. In recent years, Hungary has opened numerous factories and production lines for a range of military hardware. An Airbus factory in Gyula is building parts for propulsion systems. Kiskunfélegyháza hosts an assembly plant for

handguns.<sup>11</sup> Germany's Lynx infantry fighting vehicles are being produced at a new Rheinmetall factory in Zalaegerszeg, where Hungary also plans to co-produce the upcoming KF-51 Panther main battle tank. Hungary also finishes production of Turkish Gidrán armored combat vehicles at a plant in Kapsovár, and signed an MOU with Turkey's Nurol Makina in 2023 to open another production plant in Győr.<sup>12</sup> Along with Rheinmetall and Nurol Makina, defense contractors like Dynamit Nobel Defense and Colt CZ Group have also taken advantage of Hungary's growing defense industry.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, political and economic factors have only deepened this growth in external partnerships. Hungary stands at the crossroads of central and Eastern Europe and sits on NATO's eastern and southern flanks, making it a strategically advantageous location to do business, especially as its neighbors also build up defense capabilities. At the same time, the nation's strong logistics structures facilitate production and transit of military materials and finished systems. Another major advantage for Hungary is the nature of its defense partnerships. Rather than one-off systems purchasing, Hungary favors long-term partnerships that emphasize domestic assembly and joint research and development. This makes Hungary a more reliable, and thus attractive partner in the defense industry. At the same time, the Hungarian government has supported developing defense industries with benefits and subsidies, and uniquely, "arms exports are not politically sensitive" in the country, preventing political or social backlash from defense deals.<sup>14</sup> Hungary's labor force is also well trained, relatively inexpensive, and production costs are low compared to elsewhere in Europe.

Two major pillars of this growth are international partnerships and an emphasis on Research and Development. Rather than fully developing indigenous forces from scratch, Hungary has jumpstarted production capabilities by partnerships with existing firms from Germany, Turkey, Czechia, and elsewhere. Moreover, Hungary has emphasized finding a role in development and innovation, as well as manufacturing and assembly. Defense Minister Szalay-Bobrovniczky proudly announced in 2023 that Hungarian engineers were helping to develop Germany's new Panther MBT, highlighting Hungary's commitment to "enhancing military R&D capabilities."<sup>15</sup> This innovation drive has also incorporated military-civilian partnerships, with Hungary inaugurating a new automotive test track in Zalaegerszeg meant to serve both sectors.<sup>16</sup> In a visit to the track, technology and industry minister László Palkovics called the site part of "one of the world's fastest developing innovation ecosystems," while then-culture and innovation minister János Csák highlighting it as a "hub where universities, private companies, state developers, and research institutes can work together."<sup>17</sup>

Even more than equipment purchases and industrial partnerships, Hungary's recent defense growth has been the product of a driven, full-scale commitment to modernizing the HDF at all levels. The main policy driver of this development is the Zrínyi Program, launched in 2017, which is broken into several phases and stages of preparation and implementation charted out to 2030 and beyond. From 2016-2018, the first phase began with a comprehensive assessment of threats, challenges, and needs facing the HDF. The findings were eventually codified in the National Military and National Security Strategies of 2020-21. From 2018-2023, the first implementation stage aimed to operationalize a full medium brigade to be made usable by NATO.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to increasing longevity and improving maintenance for major platforms, such as Hungary's helicopter fleet, this stage also emphasized modernization down to the training and logistical level. Hungary's aerial support capabilities were augmented with the addition of A-319s to supplement aging An-26 and Jak-52 aircraft. At the same time, new jet and prop trainer aircraft, including the Czech ZLIN platform, were procured to help train Hungarian Gripen pilots. The procurement of new Aries-Volvo military buses, Raba military trucks, Suzuki automobiles, and the establishment of a new field supply point further emphasize both the full-spectrum nature of these modernization efforts and their focus on logistics.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, major combat systems also comprise a large part of the program, with Hungary procuring additional H145M helicopters, Leopard-2A4 training tanks, PzH 2000 self-propelled howitzers, and new small and light arms for personnel.<sup>20</sup> The second implementation phase from 2023-2026 will see the delivery of further contracted systems such as the "Embraer KC-390 military transport aircraft, L39NG aircraft, [and] Airbus H225M helicopters for the air force," and "Leopard 2-A7+ tanks and Lynx IFVs for the ground forces."<sup>21</sup> HDF sources show new H225Ms and Leopard 2A7s already arriving.<sup>22</sup>

Going forward, the second phase of the Zrínyi program aims at the creation and operationalization of a heavy brigade for NATO in 2026-2028. Beyond this, efforts will largely focus on further long-term developments, quantitative expansions, and "fine-tuning" of new systems in use.<sup>23</sup> In February, Hungary's Defense Minister highlighted a commitment to the "establishment of a major land-based armored force by 2028."<sup>24</sup> In April, General Gábor Böröndi, Chief of HDF General Staff, reaffirmed that Hungary would also "participate in the creation of the first EU battle group to be established by 2025," citing the importance of a European rapid response force.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, with Hungary's EU presidency beginning this year, Hungarian and EU officials were in agreement on the importance of "crisis management, capability development and defense industry" goals outlined in the EU Strategic Compass, along with interoperability, collective decision-making, and the availability of high readiness forces. Indeed, Chairman of the EU Military Committee, Gen. Robert Brieger, stated during a recent visit that the EU considers Hungary's defense industry "an integral part of the European Union's Defense Technological and Industrial Base."<sup>26</sup>

## The Way of Peace?

With this auspicious buildup well underway, one would think that Hungary's PM would relish the chance to present the HDF as an arsenal and bastion for Europe and NATO, ready to face any foreseeable threats on the horizon. To be certain, the Hungarian government takes pride in this achievement and stands by its commitment to military cooperation as much as to unilateral strength. However, this revitalization also comes at a time when Fidesz posters for the recent EU election boldly read "*Stop Háború!*" (Stop War!). PM Orbán's message is one critical of EU and NATO overreach that paint the organizations as warmongers that Hungary seeks to restrain, often alone. Indeed, even while calling for continued HDF modernization and growth, Hungary's Defense Minister reiterated that the government's position on Ukraine remains the same: ceasefire and immediate negotiations.<sup>27</sup> When asked if a ceasefire would mean a *de facto* victory for Russia, PM Orbán flipped the question, saying that it would most benefit Ukraine. Indeed, he speculated that Ukraine should agree to "form a buffer zone between Russia and the West – with security guarantees," rather than continue fighting and losing territory.<sup>28</sup> Rather, he believes the EU incapable of equipping Ukraine to win the war, as he sees most Europeans unhappy even with current aid



levels.<sup>29</sup> A month later, after a visit with US presidential candidate Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago, Orbán stated contently that should the former president win the upcoming election, Trump would cease all payments to Ukraine, bringing the war to an end as “it is obvious that Ukraine cannot stand on its own feet.”<sup>30</sup>

This anti-Ukraine War footing comes alongside intensifying critiques of NATO and EU actions by the Hungarian leader. Speaking on the subject of NATO’s next Secretary General, Orbán voiced his criticism of Dutch candidate, Mark Rutte, on the grounds that Rutte supports NATO military actions beyond alliance borders that would involve all members, including Hungary. Seeking to prevent this, the Prime Minister stated his aspirations “to conclude an agreement with the future secretary general that Hungary will not participate in NATO military operations against the Russians in Ukraine, despite being a NATO member.”<sup>31</sup> As NATO foreign ministers met to discuss Ukraine aid in Prague this past May, Orbán derided the efforts as appearing “like a firefighter deciding to...put out a fire with a flamethrower.” As European leaders urged Hungary to stop blocking aid funds, the Hungarian Prime Minister derided the “crazy mission” to support Ukraine as “worrying” and “dragging us, a member state [of NATO], into a world war.”<sup>32</sup> When asked about NATO plans to offer more predictable, long-term support for Ukraine, Orbán was categorical: “We do not approve of this, nor do we want to participate in financial or arms support, even within the framework of NATO.” Rather, he highlighted the defensive character of the alliance and downplayed fears of Russia threatening NATO territory after Ukraine.<sup>33</sup>

While critical of NATO designs in Ukraine, Orbán still voices support for participation in and the mission of NATO. His critique of the European Union, by contrast, is much more blistering. On the topic of Ukrainian accession, Orbán chided the EU for “blatant bias” towards Ukraine, citing that while Ukraine only needed four months to receive candidate status, it took most countries in the region closer to four years. He also condemned the decision to grant candidate status when important conditions have not been met, namely “reform of the selection of constitutional court judges; a review of the High Council of Justice; enhanced action against money laundering; the guaranteeing of media freedom; fighting corruption; tackling oligarchs; and ensuring the rights of national minorities.” He notes that while other nations had to address these conditions before gaining candidate status, Ukraine has gained that status even as efforts to meet these criteria in the country remain ongoing and unfinished.<sup>34</sup> He also cited massive estimates for EU agriculture funding (10 times what Hungary receives), cohesion funding (3 times what Hungary receives), and other financial obligations that members would incur if Ukraine joined at present. Rather, he encouraged respect for EU rules and conditions on the grounds of maintaining EU unity and institutions, and derided the alternative for as “running headlong into a brick wall.”<sup>35</sup>

His criticism of the EU goes much farther than Ukraine membership, however. Orbán criticizes Brussels for holding “reality...secondary to ideals,” with most EU politicians “saying they are in office not because of the people, but to represent lofty ideals.”<sup>36</sup> He has also spoken against fines imposed by Brussels (6 million forints per day, he noted specifically) for turning away migrants. On the subject of Ukraine, migrants, and other issues pitting Hungary at odds with the EU, the Prime Minister fully voiced his frustration: “while we are protecting Europe, Hungary gets shot in the back from Brussels. The whole situation is absurd.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Orbán increasingly refers to the EU as an “empire” with “imperial interests.” Referring to European People’s Party chief Manfred Weber discussing European

conscripted, Orbán called the project “a European imperial army,” stating, “We cannot transfer the responsibility for [Hungarian lives] to any empire.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, during a speech in Gezst, he likened current pressure from Brussels to join in Ukraine War aid to pressure from Vienna to join the First World War, which he reminded attendants cost Hungary much of its land and peoples. According to the Prime Minister, the “same danger fac[es] Central Europe today as 100 years ago: being dragged into war by imperial interests.”<sup>39</sup>

He has even recently compared Brussels to the Soviet Union, though taking care to note the difference in severity of these two entities. At a commemoration speech for the 1956 Hungarian Revolution against communist rule in 2016, Orbán singled out what he sees as a new enemy facing Hungary in the same way: “Our responsibility is to prevent Brussels from Sovietizing.”<sup>40</sup> Going further, the Prime Minister laid the alleged parallels between the EU and USSR bare in a similar address in 2023:

*The lecturing from the comrades is the same – except now it is called a “conditionality procedure”. The censure of Hungary by the Party is now called the “Brussels rule of law procedure”; and now tanks are not rolling in from the East, but dollars are rolling in from the West – to the same places, and to the same people. The big difference is that the Soviet Union was hopeless, while the European Union is not yet.*<sup>41</sup>

Orbán also spoke of changing conceptions of freedom in Europe and issues like nationality, gender identity, and religion that have brought Hungary into conflict with the EU in recent years. Striking a tone of defiance, he called Hungarians to defend traditional values as true freedom: “Not in ’56, nor in ’90, nor in 2023 were we – or are we – prepared to renounce this for the sake of Moscow or Brussels.”<sup>42</sup>

Though a Eurosceptic, Orbán aims to rally conservatives to change the EU rather than leave it. He spoke of a need to “go deeper, occupy positions, gather allies and fix the European Union.” “If we want to retain Hungary’s freedom and sovereignty,” he told rallygoers on March 15<sup>th</sup>, “we must occupy Brussels and bring change.” In a February speech, he compared his goal to the MAGA movement under Donald Trump in the US, proposing MEGA in its place: “Make Europe Great Again!” He sees his party as part of a rightward movement to bring “real change” in Europe. As though to drive home his dissatisfaction with the EU at present, he capped the statement off as such: “Down with Brussels. Long Live Europe!”<sup>43</sup>

## Bridging the Divide

So how does one make sense of these conflicting movements: towards a stronger HDF more integrated with EU and NATO forces and aims, but away from increasing European centralization and NATO activism? What political calculus guides Hungary’s Prime Minister towards building tanks, but away from sending any to a neighboring country currently under siege by Hungary’s old enemy? How, in short, do both of these political stances fit into the agenda of the current Hungarian Government? The answer comes down to understanding the central prism through which Orbán guides Hungarian policy: national interest. Rather than a concerted anti-Western, pro-Moscow stance, as western media often portrays Hungary’s actions; it makes more sense to view these positions as part of a Hungary-first platform. Orbán’s criticism of the EU is neither new nor limited to the handling of Ukraine amid its war with Russia, as seen above. And while leery of NATO discussions of intervening directly in Ukraine, Hungary remains an active and committed member of the alliance.

Indeed, recent steps towards defense revitalization are a major benefit both to the Hungarian economy and NATO strategic capabilities.

Appeals to sovereignty, national autonomy, and the conflict against globalism are consistent in the Hungarian government's objections over EU and NATO actions. Indeed, PM Orbán tends to use the term "Sovereigntist" to specifically denote positions favoring state sovereignty over the encroachment of supranational bureaucracies.<sup>44</sup> In a speech against the possibility of being dragged into war by external factors, the Prime Minister elaborated on this sovereigntist manifesto: "We elect our governments, we hold the reins of power, we Hungarians decide our fate."<sup>45</sup> His political director, Balázs Orbán (no relation), added to this reactionary stance in the face of EU pressure, saying that Hungary and other nations are "losing [their] sovereignty step by step. We want to stop this never-ending federalization." He noted that Hungarians "don't like being dictated to."<sup>46</sup> In light of this, PM Orbán placed his war opposition squarely on the grounds of national interest, saying, "Hungarians know that we must stay out of the war, because it would be contrary to Hungarian national interests." He concluded, "If a major European war breaks out, we will all be losers."<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, several practical matters bear out this self-interested ethos. Hungary and several regional neighbors still rely on Russian energy, which may be jeopardized by antagonizing Moscow.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, Hungary has an interest in protecting Hungarian minorities in Ukraine from both potential Russian attack and Ukrainian anti-minority legislation, both of which complicate its war stance.<sup>49</sup> It is the same reason, as noted in a former piece, that Hungary continues infrastructure investment partnerships with China while its neighbors de-risk and de-couple: these partnerships are tangibly beneficial to Hungary.<sup>50</sup>

In the same way that Orbán opposes supporting war efforts as counterproductive to national interests, his government supports military and defense industrial modernization precisely because it tangibly benefits Hungary. Defense Minister Szalay-Bobrovniczky summarized the point precisely in a recent address to CPAC Hungary, "We are strengthening the Hungarian Defence Forces because we want peace, we have something to protect: we have families, a home country, a home and a nation."<sup>51</sup> PM Orbán said much the same in his own interview with Kossuth Rádío, "The existence of armies is necessary; it does not lead to war. Paradoxically, the absence of a military leads to war...If you want peace, prepare for war."<sup>52</sup> In this light, strengthening Hungary's military serves to strengthen Hungarian autonomy and the security of the Hungarian people from external threat: a crucial consideration of national interest.

Moreover, the industrial element of this defense revitalization is very economically promising for Hungary. At a recent summit, the Defense Minister highlighted the value of tapping defense export markets, having the potential to "be a new cylinder in the engine of the economy."<sup>53</sup> He further stated the government's goal of having "an increasing proportion of GDP be produced by the defense industry," while ensuring that "an increasing number of local companies can join the defense industry production."<sup>54</sup> He had previously stated a goal to "double the share of Hungarian defense industry suppliers and see more businesses certified as NATO suppliers."<sup>55</sup> These goals have borne fruit, with defense companies from Germany, Turkey, and Czechia signing deals bringing domestic production to Hungary, while private companies also reap the benefits of industrial opportunities and facilities.<sup>56</sup> With Hungary's annual defense budget growing to some \$4.5 billion, 30-40% of which is allotted to capability development, this trend is likely to continue.<sup>57</sup>



All of this translates to real gains for the Hungary's allies in NATO and the EU, and Hungary remains a respected partner and contributor to both NATO and EU defense efforts.<sup>58</sup> A Hungarian general is currently heading up EUFOR Operation ALTHEA, an EU military mission in the Balkans. Hungary will also oversee military programs as part of its upcoming EU presidency. Hungarian Chief of Staff Böröndi reiterated Hungary's role in strengthening the EU defense industrial base, while drawing attention to Hungary's participation in EU programs in the Western Balkans, including a commitment to "the possible deployment of the EU's rapid reaction capability in the future, if the situation requires that." He also highlighted HDF contributions to EU battle groups and joint exercises to improve joint decision-making and interoperability.<sup>59</sup> Identifying priorities for Hungary's upcoming EU presidency, Gen. Böröndi listed "crisis management, capability development and defense industry," all of which "fully support the EU...Strategic Compass."<sup>60</sup> EU Military Committee Chairman, Gen. Brieger lauded his Hungarian counterpart, calling Hungary "a role model when it comes to the EU's common security and defense policy."<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as the strength of EU defense policy lies in civil-military cooperation and capabilities development, Hungary's presidency may be the perfect impetus for expanding ongoing defense growth efforts to other EU countries.<sup>62</sup>

NATO stands to gain even more by Hungary's recent revitalization program. Hungary's commitment to increase defense spending has already brought it above the alliance's threshold to 2.43% of GDP, higher than any western European country. As evidence of capability growth, Hungary also well exceeds requirements for equipment expenditure shares. At 48.4%, Hungary is investing in equipment at roughly the same level as Poland (52.4%) and Finland (50.8%). For comparison, the US allocates about 29.3% of defense expenditures to equipment, though differences in absolute expenditures should be noted.<sup>63</sup> More than financial gains, however, Hungary's modernization plan explicitly aims to augment NATO forces, with the Zrínyi program specifically listing a full medium brigade and later heavy brigade for NATO deployment as explicit goals.<sup>64</sup> In August 2022, the HDF became the backbone of a new NATO multinational battlegroup based in Hungary, boasting "a mechanized company, a tank squadron, an artillery battery, joint terminal attack controllers, special forces, and military police."<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, partnerships for Hungarian production of the Lynx IFV, future Panther MBT, and other military systems and components mean expanding NATO's defense industrial reserve, a critical but often overlooked element in hypothetical conflict scenarios. Indeed, while many NATO members have vociferously called for strengthening alliance capabilities, few have so clearly demonstrated actual progress towards this goal to the degree and with the success that Hungary has, even amid disagreements over what this force should be used for.

## Conclusion

On a final note, Hungary has absolutely and directly contributed to efforts in support of Ukraine. Though arguing against provisions that would harm Hungarian interests, Hungary has, in fact, voted for each of the EU's sanctions packages.<sup>66</sup> Hungary also dropped its opposition to Sweden and Finland's NATO accession bids, which were precipitated by the Ukraine conflict. By August 2022, Hungary had already taken in some 2 million Ukrainian refugees, while providing schooling for students, language programs, and workforce development courses to help integrate them into the country.<sup>67</sup> Many Hungarians privately hosted refugees wherever they could put them: in vacation rentals, empty apartments, and

elsewhere.<sup>68</sup> Hungary was among the first to deploy troops to the Ukrainian border in February 2022 to assist with security and humanitarian tasks, while Hungarian jet fighters led Baltic Air Policing patrols later in November<sup>69</sup> This goodwill did not end in 2022. As recently as February of this year, Hungary signed a letter of intent for the HDF to provide mine clearance training for the Lithuania-led Mine Action Coalition, tasked with de-mining in Ukraine.<sup>70</sup>

Far from the popular opposition image of Orbán's political program as anti-western or anti-Ukrainian, these actions outline a project more comfortably called pro-Hungarian and pro-national sovereignty, even if Hungary's allies fall on the short side of them. Where common defense and support for Ukraine do not hinder Hungary's interests, Hungary appears a proud and willing partner to its neighbor and its allies. Where efforts do conflict with Hungarian interests, Hungarian leaders oppose these efforts on the grounds that doing so benefits the constituency they primarily serve: the Hungarian people. Moreover, many of Hungary's recent defense programs have netted substantial benefits for NATO and the EU, which strengthen their footing vis-à-vis Russia and Ukraine regardless of political disagreement. Focusing only on political rhetoric at the expense of policy context amplifies division while downplaying real gains for European defense. One cannot ignore the fact that Hungary, even while calling for an end to the conflict in Ukraine, has risen to the task of rebuilding set forward by NATO and the EU in spite of these reservations. Whatever the political differences, Hungary's defense development model presents an encouraging example for allies to take initiative as emerging threats in the 21<sup>st</sup> century make programs like Zrínyi more and more indispensable.

## Endnotes

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