

## **Towards a Connectivity Corps**

Three foreign language focused frameworks for fostering future Hungarian connectivity

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# Towards a Connectivity Corps

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## **Abstract**

*In an increasingly interconnected world, linguistic proficiency has become a strategic asset for nations. This paper explores how Hungary can leverage foreign language knowledge and use it to maximize its worldwide bilateral connectivity. This paper does so by proposing a 'Connectivity Corps' framework for Hungary. This framework is inspired by Balázs Orbán's state strategy of 'connectivity', an extension of the 2010 Eastern Opening and of the 2015 Southern Opening. The Connectivity Corps would wield as many languages as possible to advance bilateral ties. Towards this goal, this paper first assesses the current state of language knowledge and learning in Hungary. It then suggests three frameworks for the Hungarian state to follow: focusing on the most widely spoken languages; a unit called 'Connectivity Coordination' to better conduct bilateral foreign language partnerships; and the utilization of peripheral languages. Through these strategies, Hungary can enhance its global standing, create profitable international partnerships, and safeguard its national interests. The goal is to expand Hungary's role in international affairs by fostering a future in which it is equipped with the language skills needed to navigate a competitive global landscape.*

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## Introduction

Balázs Orbán has been the Political Director of the Prime Minister of Hungary since August 2021. In March 2023, he penned an article<sup>1</sup> for the *European Council on Foreign Relations* entitled 'Connectivity: a Hungarian globalisation strategy'. In it, he posited that, as 'an alternative to both the neoliberal world order and the model of globalisation based on international blocs', Hungary 'should strive to maintain connections with as many other countries and market players from all over the world as possible'. This would be the basis for his manual for Hungarian statecraft *Hussar Cut* (2024).

To be maintained, a connection has to exist in the first place. Having as many Hungarian citizens as possible become fluent in the languages of 'other countries and market players from all over the world' would be highly conducive to this objective.

It can be objected that English can already be used to communicate with many people around the world, especially in large cities. But this contact can never be as intimate as in the native tongue of one's interlocutor. Thus, the businessman or representative who is both familiar with another country's culture and fluent in its language has a decisive competitive advantage.

This paper will expand upon the original concept of a 'Connectivity Corps'. This proposed new body of the Hungarian state would be involved in both trade and diplomacy. It would be answerable directly to the Hungarian government. Its aim would be to enact connectivity in the realm of bilateral relations. It would be composed of both Hungarian nationals and foreigners, and run rationally by a small but diligent and dynamic administration.

Two subsidiary bodies of the Connectivity Corps will also be proposed in this paper: Connectivity Coordination, the organizational branch of the Connectivity Corps; and the Opening Custodians of the Connectivity Corps, in charge of the advertisement and promotion of Connectivity Corps activities.

This paper is written both as a policy recommendation for the Hungarian government and for the Anglosphere to gain insight into the implications of contemporary Hungarian statecraft. It will first assess the current state of the knowledge, learning and usage of foreign languages in Hungary. It will then propose three frameworks that the Hungarian state could adopt towards achieving connectivity in relation to the knowledge, learning and use of foreign languages: the logic of most widely spoken languages; a method for bilateral foreign language agreements; and the profitability of peripheral languages in the pursuit of connectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> Balázs Orbán, 'Connectivity: A Hungarian globalisation strategy', *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 6 March 2023  
<https://ecfr.eu/article/connectivity-a-hungarian-globalisation-strategy/>

## I. Foreign languages in present-day Hungary

The necessary step ahead of any policy proposition is to examine the present state of its realm.

On foreign languages in present-day Hungary, we will go over, in order, the knowledge, learning and use of foreign languages in present-day Hungary.

This should paint us a clearer picture of the material we are working with, thus giving us an idea of the shape it could be moulded into and of the tools to be used on it.

### a. Knowledge of foreign languages in present-day Hungary

According to *Eurostat* data<sup>2</sup>, in 2016, the proportion of Hungarians who could not speak any foreign language was nearly 58%.

As per an 18 December 2019 article<sup>3</sup> in *Index*, this also meant that Hungary had the third highest proportion of people in Europe who could only express themselves in their native language, after Romania and Britain.

However, as was reported by *G7* in an October 2023 article<sup>4</sup>, the contemporary Hungarian youth is very proficient in foreign languages:

Age group	Language proficiency			
	English	German	Russian	French
10-19	39.8%	13.2%	0.7%	1.4%
20-29	52.5%	18.5%	1.3%	2.5%
30-39	45.5%	21.2%	1.3%	2.4%
40-49	31.6%	16.6%	2.3%	2.0%
50-59	17.3%	10.5%	3.6%	1.3%
60-69	9.0%	8.8%	3.6%	1.1%
70-79	5.8%	8.7%	3.3%	1.2%
80-89	3.1%	6.2%	2.2%	0.7%
90+	2.8%	8.6%	1.6%	1.3%

Source: *KSH*, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Tünde Kurucz, 'Kiderült: ennyien beszélnek idegen nyelveket Magyarországon', *Eduline*, 28 September 2023

[https://eduline.hu/nyelvtanulas/20230928\\_idegennyelv\\_angol\\_nemet\\_nepszamlalas\\_ksh](https://eduline.hu/nyelvtanulas/20230928_idegennyelv_angol_nemet_nepszamlalas_ksh)

<sup>3</sup> *Index*, 'A magyarok több mint fele nem beszél semmilyen idegen nyelvet', *Index*, 18 December 2019

<https://index.hu/techtud/2019/12/18/idegen-nyelv-magyarorszag-eurostat-europa/>

<sup>4</sup> Fabók Bálint, 'A fiatal magyar felnőttek már több mint fele beszél angolul', *G7*, 5 October 2023

<https://g7.hu/adat/20231005/a-fiatal-magyar-felnottek-mar-toobb-mint-fele-besz-el-angolul/>

This bodes well for the Connectivity Corps, as the pool from which it can draw Hungarians fluent in at least one foreign language is wide and can grow ever wider.

However, many outlets have deplored the Hungarian brain drain. One such outlet is ATV, the first Hungarian private TV channel, in a December 2023 report<sup>5</sup> ominously entitled ‘Bigger blood loss than the 1956 emigration’. The most salient figure in this article was that ‘only 6 out of 10 young people definitely imagine their future in Hungary’. This points to a cruel lack of domestic career opportunities for the polyglottic youth of the country.

The Connectivity Corps could channel the talent of young Hungarians, rather than neglecting it and letting it be scouted abroad.

## b. Learning of foreign languages in present-day Hungary

According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (*Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*), for the academic year 2023-2024, out of ~716 000 primary school students and ~546 000 secondary school students<sup>6</sup>, these were the cumulative foreign languages learned by those students:

### Primary schools<sup>7</sup>

Language	Learners
English	437,622
German	92,875
French	1,567
Spanish	1,211
Italian	417
Russian	374
Latin	60
Others	3,149

### Secondary schools<sup>8</sup>

Language	Learners
English	460,967
German	180,469
French	18,800
Italian	17,430
Spanish	16,491
Russian	4,159
Latin	2,513
Others	2,008

<sup>5</sup> ATV, ‘Menekülnek a fiatalok Magyarországról: „Nagyobb vérveszteség, mint az 1956-os emigráció”’, ATV, 9 December 2023

<https://www.atv.hu/belfold/20231209/fiatalok-magyarorszag-emigracio/>

<sup>6</sup> Hungarian Central Statistical Office, “Education data, 2023/2024 (preliminary data)”, *Hungarian Central Statistical Office*, consulted on 31 January 2025

<https://www.ksh.hu/s/kiadvanyok/oktatasi-adatok-20232024-elozetes-adatok/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> Hungarian Central Statistical Office, “Foreign language learners in primary school”, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, consulted on 31 January 2025

[https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/okt/okt0009.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/okt/okt0009.html)

<sup>8</sup> Hungarian Central Statistical Office, “Foreign language learners in secondary schools”, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, consulted on 31 January 2025

[https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/okt/okt0016.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/okt/okt0016.html)

The same dataset also indicates a continuous decline in the teaching of German and French in Hungarian primary schools. The former dropped from 157,365 learners in 2010/2011 to 92,875 learners in 2023/2024, while the latter dropped from 2,344 learners in 2010/2011 to 1,567 learners in 2023/2024.

Meanwhile, the teaching of English and Spanish in Hungarian primary schools has seen a continuous rise in Hungarian primary schools. The former rose from 359,032 in 2010/2011 to 437,622 in 2023/2024, while the latter rose from 422 learners in 2010/2011 to 1,211 learners in 2023/2024.

Let us compare this data with the 10 most widely spoken languages in the world in 2024 according to *Ethnologue*<sup>9</sup>, an annual reference publication that provides statistics and other information on the living languages of the world:

Language	Speakers	% of world population (8 000 000 000 people)
English	1,515,000,000	18.9 %
Mandarin Chinese	1,140,000,000	14.3 %
Hindi	608,800,000	7.6 %
Spanish	559,500,000	7.0 %
Standard Arabic	332,500,000	4.2 %
French	311,600,000	3.9 %
Bengali	278,200,000	3.5 %
Portuguese	263,800,000	3.3 %
Russian	255,400,000	3.2 %
Urdu	237,900,000	3.0 %

We understand that Hungary's language teaching policy is obviously not designed to match the most spoken languages in the world. However, let the following be considered a thought experiment to trace the logic of connectivity over the existing situation of teaching languages in Hungary.

English aside, there is a general major mismatch between the most spoken languages in the world and the languages taught in Hungarian primary and secondary schools.

The small drop in learners of French and the small rise in learners of Spanish in Hungarian primary schools does match with Spanish being more widely spoken than French throughout the world.

<sup>9</sup> 'What are the top 200 most spoken languages?', *Ethnologue*, 2025  
<https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/ethnologue200/>



However, both languages are largely underrepresented in the Hungarian education system, compared with German, which does not rank among the ten most spoken languages in the world.

Still, the gradual decline in German learners in Hungarian primary schools does correlate with Standard German's lower rank than the other languages mentioned above according to *Ethnologue* (12<sup>th</sup> most spoken language in the world, with 133,900,000 speakers). Viewed not strictly through the lens of connectivity, this decline is actually surprising, given the shared Habsburg heritage of Hungary and nearby Germany being a more natural choice for trade and other relations.

A connective Hungary might seek not only to drastically increase the amount of learners of French and Spanish in primary schools, but also to introduce Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, Standard Arabic, and other widely-spoken languages in primary schools.

### c. Use of foreign languages in present-day Hungary

We mentioned trade and diplomacy in the introduction.

With regard to trade, as per a 23 July 2024 article in *Pénzcentrum*, a prominent Hungarian financial and economic news website, *'statistics clearly show that, alongside English, French and German are the most in-demand languages, especially in the corporate sector – but Scandinavian and Asian languages are also on the rise'*.

Additionally, while *'in the case of bilingualism, German is the most common language among Hungarian employees, along with English'*, followed by French, Italian and Spanish, *'Chinese and Korean language skills are becoming increasingly popular among those in higher education, and the demand for them is also constantly growing'*.

Finally, *'languages that are only spoken in a given country, such as Dutch, Portuguese, Polish, Czech or Greek, usually offer higher earning potential, as the number of native speakers is smaller. [...] Employees who speak these languages at an interpreting level can expect an outstanding level of earnings.'*

This indicates clear incentive, for both the state and the people of Hungary, towards learning a variety of foreign languages, both widely spoken and not as widely spoken. This is promising for the Connectivity Corps to recruit and be active in the realm of trade.

With regard to diplomacy, the Eastern Opening since 2010, the Southern Opening since 2015, and the doctrine of connectivity today all mobilise language skills on the part of the Hungarian state.

Hungary's Eastern Opening policy involved 'the open pursuit of closer relationships with Eastern states, in particular China, Russia, Turkey but also Central Asian



countries, most notably Azerbaijan.’<sup>10</sup> In the words of Viktor Orbán upon announcing the policy, ‘we sail under the Western flag, but the wind is blowing in the East of the world economy’<sup>11</sup>.

Hungary’s Southern Opening policy involved, according to Zsolt Németh, the restoration of ties with the southern hemisphere which ‘were almost completely suppressed in the period between the regime change of 1990 and 2010.’<sup>12</sup> The Southern Opening is understood to be a continuation of the Eastern Opening.

Hungarian media are very divided as to the results of the Eastern Opening. The harshest critics have deemed it practically useless, while even those who praise its results must concede that they were less than initially envisaged.

The Southern Opening, oriented towards Africa and South America, appears to have yielded greater fruit so far. The *Oeconomus Gazdaságkutató Alapítvány* [Oeconomus Economic Research Foundation], a Budapest-based economic research institute founded in 2019, wrote in the conclusion to a March 2023 publication that pertained to both openings: ‘During the expansion of foreign trade relations, new trading houses were opened in Ethiopia, Angola, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Kenya, and new embassies began operating in Ecuador, Ethiopia, Ghana and Angola. In 2016, a Hungarian steel industry investment was launched in Tunisia, and water purification units were built with Hungarian investment in several parts of Africa, as well as student exchange programs. All of these contributed greatly to the revival of Hungarian-African relations, which had been declining in the 1990s and early 2000s, and they provided new economic opportunities for both parties (Neszmélyi, 2017).’<sup>13</sup>

It remains too early to judge connectivity, which is meant to perfect the strategy for both openings. It is for this reason that the present paper draws up a linguistic framework to ensure that connectivity can be achieved with the most effective results.

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<sup>10</sup> Greilinger G., ‘Hungary’s Eastern Opening Policy as a Long-Term Political-Economic Strategy’, *AIES*, 4/2023

<https://www.aies.at/download/2023/AIES-Fokus-2023-04.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Hungary Today, ‘Opening to the East May be More Successful than Previously Expected’, *Hungary Today*, 17 January 2024

<https://hungarytoday.hu/opening-to-the-east-may-be-more-successful-than-previously-expected/>

<sup>12</sup> Zsolt Németh, ‘The vision of a central european economic area in the background of the hungarian v4 presidency’, *Hungarian Review*, 24 November 2021

<https://hungarianreview.com/article/he-vision-of-a-central-european-economic-area-in-the-background-of-the-hungarian-v4-presidency/>

<sup>13</sup> Oeconomus Gazdaságkutató Alapítvány, ‘Keleti és déli nyitás stratégia: milyen eredményekkel változtak a hazai külgazdaság irányai 2022-ig?’ *Oeconomus Gazdaságkutató Alapítvány*, 1 March 2023, [www.oeconomus.hu/irasok/keleti-es-deli-nyitas-strategia-milyen-eredmenyekkel-valtoztak-a-hazai-kulgzdasag-iranyai-2022-ig/](http://www.oeconomus.hu/irasok/keleti-es-deli-nyitas-strategia-milyen-eredmenyekkel-valtoztak-a-hazai-kulgzdasag-iranyai-2022-ig/)

## II. Bilateral foreign language partnerships

Before establishing targets for the Connectivity Corps, we must establish a framework for conducting language learning partnerships. We will call the authority in charge of applying this method **Connectivity Coordination**.

With both the return of Trump, who has started withdrawing the U. S. from international organizations again<sup>14</sup>, and the towering power of China, which prefers to deal with individual EU Member States rather than with the EU as a whole<sup>15</sup>, focusing on bilateral relations is the way of the world and must also be the way of the West.

In order to keep track of the activities of the Connectivity Corps, Connectivity Coordination ought to rationalise the endeavours of the Connectivity Corps.

### a. Desired outcomes

The desired material outcomes of a bilateral foreign language partnerships would include, by order of magnitude:

1. Bilingual schools and cultural centres
2. Courses and exchange programmes
3. Deals and events

The desired economic outcomes of a bilateral foreign language partnerships would include, in order of magnitude:

1. Full funding by the partner country
2. Partial funding by the partner country
3. No funding by the partner country

Towards achieving connectivity, a third set of metrics ought to be taken into account:

1. Strategic language priorities of Hungary
2. How many of this type of partnership have already been conducted
3. How many partnerships in this language have already been conducted

Potential partnerships ought to be prioritised by both orders of magnitude. In the case of partial funding by the partner country, potential partnerships ought to be prioritised by order of least to most financially burdensome funding for Hungary and/or by the percentage of the financial burden on Hungary.

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<sup>14</sup> The White House, 'Withdrawing the United States from the World Health Organization', *The White House*, 20 January 2025

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-the-worldhealth-organization/>

<sup>15</sup> This has been told to us by Chinese officials and scholars.

Connectivity Coordination would keep track of the founding and running of bilateral foreign language partnerships following this template.

## b. Examples

### *Bilingual schools and cultural centres*

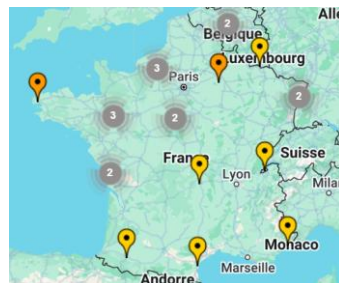
There already exist many Hungarian-English schools in Hungary: *Eduline*, a significant online education news portal in Hungary, listed 43 as of October 2021.<sup>16</sup>

There also exist bilingual schools for languages other than English in Hungary, such as the Hungarian-Chinese Bilingual Elementary and High School in District XV of Budapest.

Familiarity from a very young age remains the most effective way of achieving a linguistic competitive advantage, rendering the founding of such non-English bilingual schools a priority endeavour for achieving connectivity.

There also exist many foreign language cultural centres in Hungary. Most of them are logically to be found in Budapest.

However, the concentration of foreign cultural centres in the capital city is not inevitable. The 22 Confucius Institutes in France, for instance, are distributed evenly across the country's territory:



Source: institutconfucius.fr

In Hungary as well, cultural centres could be distributed evenly across the country. This would increase the prestige of the counties, whose prosperity is a tenet of political stability in Hungary.

While most partner countries would certainly prefer a spot in Budapest, more attractive prices and adequate support on the part of county authorities could make up for this. Meanwhile, the proximity of border cities with neighbouring countries could help advertise those centres, as they provide easier access to said neighbouring countries.

<sup>16</sup> Bezzeg Hanna, 'Itt a teljes lista: íme Budapest összes két tanítási nyelvű iskolája', *Eduline*, 16 October 2021  
[https://eduline.hu/kozoktatasi/20211014\\_Ket\\_tanitasi\\_nyelvu\\_budapesti\\_iskolak](https://eduline.hu/kozoktatasi/20211014_Ket_tanitasi_nyelvu_budapesti_iskolak)

### *Courses and exchange programmes*

Eötvös Loránd University has already developed partnerships with universities from all five continents of the world. Such partnerships would constitute the bedrock which the Connectivity Corps would take as an example.

There also exist many Hungarian exchange programmes with neighbouring countries. An example of one such programme is CultDialogue<sup>17</sup>, conducted between the city of Nyíregyháza in northeastern Hungary and the city of Nagykapos in southeastern Slovakia.

Cross-border cultural activities implemented by CultDialogue include local history competitions, intergenerational and intercultural events (such as storytelling sessions where older generations share experiences with youth and culinary workshops where traditional recipes are prepared together), and exchange programs through which citizens are enabled the possibility to experience life in the partner city<sup>18</sup>.

This experience Hungary has in exchange programmes between border cities could be advertised to foreign institutions also located in border regions.

The Stipendium Hungaricum offers scholarships for foreign students at Hungarian universities. Launched in 2013, its provisions<sup>19</sup> include tuition-free education, a monthly stipend, accommodation contribution and medical insurance. Over a decade of facilitating international students to study in Europe can be leveraged to encourage reciprocal programmes with extra-European countries.

### *Deals and events*

Compared with other EU Member States, Hungary is a major recipient of international business. This is largely because Hungary enacts its trade policy on the basis of its own, well-understood rational interests. Hungary does not follow bloc logic: it does not align with other groups of countries at the expense of its own interests.

Hungary also hosts many international events, most of them in Budapest. Some of those are strictly for bilateral relations, but others are not so limited, such as exhibits or conferences with no direct relevance to bilateral relations.

To ensure that it is the recipient of such events, Hungary competes with other countries that have more resources to mobilise. It would be a mission of the Connectivity Corps to link up more directly with the foreigners who are key to ensuring such events are organised in partnership with Hungary.

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<sup>17</sup> EGTC Monitor, 'Európai Határvárosok ETT', *EGTC Monitor*, consulted on 7 March 2025

<https://egtcmonitor.cesci-net.eu/hu/projektek/cultdialogue/>

<sup>18</sup> Interreg Szlovákia-Magyarország, 'A szlovák-magyar kulturális értékek közvetítésének eszközei a fiatalok megtartásban és a nemzetiségek közötti megértés erősítésben', Európai Határvárosok Korlátolt Felelősségű Európai Területi Együttműködési Csoportosulás, 2020

[https://hu.vkapusany.sk/download\\_file\\_f.php?id=1292177](https://hu.vkapusany.sk/download_file_f.php?id=1292177)

<sup>19</sup> Stipendium Hungaricum 'About' section, consulted on 7 March 2025

<https://stipendiumhungaricum.hu/about/>

### c. Method

The main objective of bilateral language partnerships is twofold:

1. for Hungary to achieve connectivity by creating and curating concrete connections with foreign countries and actors;
2. for Hungary to acquire as many resources as possible, while spending as few resources as possible.

For the partner country to be interested, the basic deal would be as follows: the partner country funds Hungary, in exchange for which Hungary will familiarize its sons and daughters with the partner country's language, culture and interests within a given framework.

Hungary's reputation as diplomatic keystone of the West, dissident within the EU and doorway to Europe can be leveraged.

*Diplomatic keystone of the West:* Hungary's ability to punch above its geopolitical weight is best illustrated by the metaphor of the keystone, which is the central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together.

This trait is best leveraged with Western and Eastern powers looking for neutral middle grounds in which to interact with the other side.

*Dissident within the EU:* the EU liberal establishment regularly singles out Hungary as being the black sheep of Europe, wrong against the rest. This ostracism ought to be sublimated as Hungary being instead the black swan of Europe, right against the rest.

The first aspect of this trait is best leveraged with self-styled enemies of the West, which may invest in Hungary because they perceive it is as a state which can be dealt with outside the confines of values-based diplomacy. The second aspect of this trait is best leveraged with anti-liberal elements within countries dominated by a liberal establishment.

*Doorway to Europe:* the EU liberal establishment also paints Hungary as a cruel sentinel against immigration into the EU. Hungary's position can be sublimated as a recipient only of the highest-quality immigrants to the EU.

This trait is best leveraged with the Global South, which is already the primary target of the Eastern and Southern Openings which preceded the doctrine of connectivity.

### III. Most widely spoken languages logic

A country that espouses connectivity claims to reach out to as many other countries in the world as possible.

This same country could carry out this programme to its logical conclusion by adapting its language knowledge, teaching and usage objectives to the most spoken languages out there.

As Hungary's international interests are multi-layered, the Connectivity Corps (CC) in charge of carrying out this programme, as defined in the introduction, would be separated into three instances:

- a. A **Worldwide** Connectivity Corps to match Hungary's worldwide agenda
- b. A **European** Connectivity Corps to match Hungary's European agenda
- c. The **Opening Custodians of the Connectivity Corps** to promote CC activities

#### a. Worldwide Connectivity Corps

A country that espouses connectivity claims to reach out to as many other countries in the world as possible. This same country could carry out this programme to its logical conclusion by adapting its language knowledge, learning and use objectives to the most spoken languages.

By embracing this blunt approach, Hungary would mathematically maximize a Worldwide Connectivity Corps (WCC)'s ability to link up with as many people in the world as possible. This straightforward and holistic approach makes it most fitting for big cities and the online space.

Referring back to *Ethnologue's* ten most spoken WCC Connectivity Corps could be comprised of the following amount of members, which corresponds to the global percentage of speakers of each language below:

- 189 English speakers
- 143 Mandarin Chinese speakers
- 76 Hindi speakers
- 70 Spanish speakers
- 42 Standard Arabic speakers
- 39 French speakers
- 35 Bengali speakers
- 33 Portuguese speakers
- 32 Russian speakers
- 30 Urdu speakers
- Etc.

Each WCC member would be tasked with monitoring existing and potential bilateral partnerships between Hungary and the countries whose official language is the assigned language of the WCC member.



The WCC would best be recruited among foreign nationals, at least in the first years of its existence. This would be more practical than recruiting from the current pool of Hungarian nationals.

This would remain so until one full generation of Hungarians raised to participate in connectivity has elapsed. After those Hungarian have successfully gone through their entire formal education, they could then replenish the ranks of the WCC initially occupied by foreign nationals.

## **b. European Connectivity Corps**

Denis Cunningham is the Managing Director of DACE Services, a Linguapax Advisory Board Member and the Honorary Counsellor and former President and Secretary General of *Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes*. His international linguistic expertise, his focus on minority and endangered languages and his recognition of the Hungarian language's uniqueness make him an expert worth listening to for the Hungarian government. As part of the 2009 collective work *Hungarian as a European and World Language*, he wrote that:

*'They say that Austria is the centre of the new Europe. If that is indeed the case, then Hungary is geographically located at the crossroads of East and West, North and South. Its linguistic position is not weak either, as it has a strong tradition of multilingualism; its relations with the East are facilitated by Russian, and with the West by English, French and German. Hungarian, as you know better than I do, is spoken by millions in Hungary, in the states of the region and in the even more distant diaspora. With the further multiplication of EU member states, it is not inconceivable that Hungary will eventually find itself at the heart of the Union.'*<sup>20</sup>

Some progress can be made towards dealing with the current disputes between the EU establishment and Hungary by expanding the logic of connectivity across the EU Member States.

Good bilateral relations between Hungary and its fellow European Union Member States (EUMS) might not be enough to curb the tendency of EUMS mainstream media and governments to single out Hungary for criticism. However, they could still serve as a useful soft power asset.

The centrality of Brussels is a construct of the European Coal and Steel Community, the original founding organisation of the EU. In anticipation of this *status quo* changing as a result of geopolitical shifts, elements with a connective disposition should be identified in every EUMS. Concrete partnerships should then be conducted with the assistance of those elements.

In this manner, if a consolidated European Union does become more focused on its geographical centre, Budapest would be competitive with the likes of Vienna in taking the lead with the assent of decisionmakers across the EU. This is especially true given

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<sup>20</sup> Nádor, Orsolya (editor), *A Magyar Mint Európai És Világnyelv*, Balassi Intézet, 2009  
[https://manye.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/18\\_1\\_KotetNador\\_Orsolya.pdf](https://manye.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/18_1_KotetNador_Orsolya.pdf)



the good relations Hungary presently enjoys with the U. S. and China, the world's two greatest powers, and the decent relations Hungary enjoys with the Russian Federation.

The more bilateral partnerships the connectivity corps concludes in the meantime, the higher the chances that Budapest could become the centre of a reformed, more connective European Union.



### c. Opening Custodians of the Connectivity Corps

As mentioned in 1-c, the Eastern Opening since 2010 and the Southern Opening since 2015 could yield more fruit than they already have. Hence their elevation into the holistic doctrine of connectivity.

Yet this evolution in Hungary's foreign policy terminology should not make us forget a crucial component of what made Hungary's two opening policies effective: the implication of a previous state of being closed.

It remains a fundamental reality that Hungary's geopolitical existence comes:

1. first, within the EU, which has tendencies for both commercial and ideological isolation from the rest of the world;
2. second, within the broader West, which exists under partial U.S. cultural hegemony, and is often considered by critics of the West to exist under outright American cultural hegemony.

The switch of terminology from openings to connectivity appears a more perfect solution to this state of affairs. But there is nothing remarkable in a permanent open-door policy, and because the resources of a state of the size of Hungary are limited, those resources cannot actually be focused on the whole world at all times.

Just like the Ottoman sultan's Sublime Porte, the doors to Hungarian trade and diplomacy should be impressive to foreign decisionmakers and governments, and its opening should be seen as an event rather than as a fact.

It would thus be the role of the Opening Custodians of the Connectivity Corps to publicise Hungarian connectivity in general and make sure the world pays close attention to its orientation when Hungary does decide the time is ripe to open up to this or that country.

Journalistic and academic coverage was given, for instance, to Hungary's relations with Ghana<sup>21</sup> and Angola<sup>22</sup>; around the time that such attention is given in publications, it would be the duty of the Opening Custodians of the Connectivity Corps to draw attention to the bilateral relation in question. This way, Hungary would maximize the usefulness of being on the collective mind of relevant decisionmakers and governments.

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<sup>21</sup> Ginelli, Zoltán. 'Hungary and Ghana: What Do Their 1960s Forgotten Relations Tell Us About the Southern Opening after 2015?' *Zoltán Ginelli*, 14 June 2022  
<https://zoltanginelli.com/2022/06/14/hungary-and-ghana-what-do-their-1960s-forgotten-relations-tell-us-about-the-southern-opening-after-2015/>

<sup>22</sup> Berta, Zsolt. 'Africa in Hungary's Cold War Policy: Case Study of the Hungarian Relations to Angola.' *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2021, pp. 83-101, <https://jceeas.bdi.uni-obuda.hu/index.php/jceeas/article/view/73>

## IV. Profitability of peripheral languages

National languages widely associated with a given country should be a priority. But it would be a wide blind spot for the Connectivity Corps to not take into account other languages whose use could also secure a decisive competitive advantage in trade and diplomacy.

We delineate three main categories for peripheral languages:

- **localized** languages
- **minoritized** languages
- **ancient** languages

### a. Localized languages

The broad official languages associated with a given country are but the surface of the linguistic skills needed to truly connect with this country.

*Vitisphère*, a French wine magazine, published in a 20 May 2016 article<sup>23</sup> the interview of two local experts to find out how wine fits into Chinese life and the best strategy to capitalize on it.

One quote by Li Zhu, Chairman of Beijing International Wine & Spirit Exchange, is particularly relevant to our understanding of the importance of local languages: *'When China opened up to the world, Europeans made the mistake of thinking that all Chinese speak Chinese. This is a gross error [...] In China, there are more than 1,000 Chinese dialects and less than 40% of people know how to speak Mandarin. You must therefore always find local contacts in each city to support your communication efforts. We see people arriving from Hong Kong or Malaysia who speak English very well but who do not understand anything about our culture. Some companies, French and others, continue to make the same mistake of mixing everything up.'*

John H. Isacs, CEO of Enjoy Gourmet, agrees: *'A marketing plan that targets the whole of China is doomed to failure. You have to target niches, knowing that a niche in China can represent 100 million people. Some importers claim to cover the whole country – it's ridiculous, no one can do it. A businessman from Shanghai does not do business in Guangzhou, the people there would not accept it'.*

The language in question, Cantonese, is a major subset of Yue Chinese, which numbers 86 million speakers. The Hungary-sponsored businessman who will deal in Southern China while speaking the dialect, rather than simply Mandarin Chinese, will ensure Hungarian interests get ahead of the competition.

The question may be raised of when, if ever, familiar contact with the speakers of localized languages would be relevant. It is not every day, after all, that a Hungarian

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<sup>23</sup> Sharon Nagel, « La Chine a besoin de bons vins à des prix raisonnables », *Vitisphère*, 20 May 2016 <https://www.vitisphere.com/actualite-82736--la-chine-a-besoin-de-bons-vins-a-des-prix-raisonnables-.html>

meets a speaker of Telugu or Hausa with whom they hope to conduct a business transaction.

However, the material conditions created by ever-expanding information technology make taking the trouble of working localized language into the Connectivity Corps more immediately useful than first meets the eye.

Not only does growing internet coverage across especially Asia and Africa mean a fresh potential market opens up with each new hotspot; but Hungarian interests there must compete against seasoned English-speaking international businessmen.

The Hungarian speaker of localized languages will stand out to the Asian and African businessman, for in trade as in other endeavours, the more familiar solution that is also the path of least resistance is usually picked before any other.

## b. 'Minoritized' languages

There is an ongoing academic debate as to whether linguists ought rather to speak of 'minority' or of 'minoritized' languages. *Eurac Research's* Elan Chiochetti summarised this debate thus in a March 2024 publication<sup>24</sup>:

*'A well-known definition by a UN sub-commission dates back to the 1970s. A minority is a "group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language".'*

*Some scholars prefer the term 'minoritised language' to emphasise the aspect of disempowerment and of subordination to those who speak the national language. The idea of a national language is relatively recent and connected to the emergence of modern nation states.'*

The notion of both a minority and minoritized language is relevant to the interests of a connective Hungary.

Conducting standard business with those 'minority' or 'minoritized' language speakers would provide Hungary with a material stake in their affairs. This interest could then be leveraged in Hungary's dealings with either anyone who speaks this 'minoritized' language or the government which is reputed to be giving them differential treatment.

Following the connectivity strategy, Hungary would thus be a rational and rationalizing force in the power dynamic between government and 'minoritized' language speakers.

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<sup>24</sup> Elena Chiochetti, 'What Is the Difference Between a Minority Language and a Minoritised Language?' *Eurac Research*, 13 April 2022  
<https://www.eurac.edu/en/blogs/connecting-the-dots/what-is-the-difference-between-a-minority-language-and-a-minoritised-language>

By counting on the contagion of this strictly-business approach, Hungary could even be a factor for peace in the regions it is involved in.

This could be modelled on the already extensive initiatives and programmes developed by the Hungarian state towards the Hungarian minorities of neighbouring countries.

Aside from CultDialogue, which was mentioned before, such programmes include: the [Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program](#), which aims to strengthen Hungarian communities worldwide by sending young Hungarians as cultural ambassadors to support local organizations and foster Hungarian cultural life; the [Petőfi Sándor Program](#), which deploys volunteers to assist in preserving Hungarian language and traditions through educational and cultural activities; and the [Mikes Kelemen Program](#), which collects and repatriates Hungarian cultural artifacts, books, and documents from diaspora communities to Hungary, ensuring the preservation of Hungarian heritage.

### c. Ancient languages

A businessperson or diplomat who knows Latin and Greek is only on par with any learned man a century ago, but light years ahead of many of our contemporaries even in the highest circles of trade and diplomacy. Such knowledge gives this businessperson or diplomat an advantage in prestige that is worth as much as speaking their interlocutor's native language, thanks to the assumption either that cultural capital comes with economic capital, or that high cultural capital people are easier to swindle, which creates business engagement in the first place that the high cultural capital person can use to their benefit if they also have business acumen.

But besides personal prestige, there are ways in which an interest in ancient languages can facilitate trade and diplomacy, especially in the highest circles.

The origins of the Hungarian language and people remain shrouded in mystery. There are those who would group them up with Estonian and Finnish, perhaps out of a similar confoundment (a few throw Basque in the mix, too); there are those who seek origins for the Hungarians as far-flung as beyond the Urals, or as far-fetched as ancient Mesopotamia; and there are those who will confidently elaborate on a simpler story of steppe nomads and Slavs, thinking Occam's razor is suitable for trimming Árpád's beard.

Whatever the reality, the uncertain origins of the Hungarian language are a source of potential strength to create ties with foreign countries' millionaires and dignitaries.

On a much more grounded basis, through expertise and theories on the ancient Turkic languages and peoples, finer narratives around Turanism can also be woven in the service of reinforcing bilateral and multilateral relations with Turkic countries.

Therefore, the Connectivity Corps should spare some room for the learning and diffusion of knowledge and theories about ancient languages.

## Conclusion

The pursuit of a Connectivity Corps in Hungary is not just a linguistic ambition, but also a strategic necessity to enhance the nation's connectivity. While English continues to dominate as the most learned and used language, the growing demand for other languages, such as German, French, and Spanish, shows promise for Hungary's future in multilingual engagement. However, to truly optimize its position on the global stage, Hungary must go beyond these conventional choices.

The most widely spoken languages logic highlights the need for Hungary to strategically invest in languages like Mandarin, Hindi, and Standard Arabic, which dominate global communication. These languages offer unparalleled opportunities for Hungary's engagement with countries that play key roles in international trade and diplomacy. A Worldwide Connectivity Corps focusing on these major languages will provide a practical foundation for Hungary's international interactions. It will do so alongside a European Connectivity Corps tailored to Hungary's immediate regional needs. Both's public relations would be fostered by the Opening Custodians of the Connectivity Corps.

Our bilateral foreign language partnership model presents a methodical way for Hungary to deepen linguistic and cultural exchanges with key nations. The establishment of bilingual schools, cultural centres, and exchange programs, combined with carefully negotiated deals, will ensure that Hungary's connectivity efforts are economically viable and strategically sound. The emphasis on securing funding from partner nations further strengthens the sustainability of these initiatives.

Peripheral languages—localized, minoritized, and ancient languages—add a nuanced dimension to Hungary's language strategy. By also focusing on localized languages, Hungary can foster deeper, more meaningful connections with foreign markets. Engaging with minoritized languages will allow Hungary to function as a rational and mediating force in regions with complex political dynamics. Meanwhile, an appreciation for ancient languages and the prestige associated with their knowledge can provide Hungary's diplomats and businesspeople with a competitive edge in high-level interactions, particularly in elite and eccentric circles.

Through the creation of the Connectivity Corps, a well-rounded approach to language learning and usage, and a commitment to fostering international partnerships, Hungary can successfully position itself as a linguistic and geopolitical connector.



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