



HUNGARY

NATO member



since 1999

Defence share in GDP

2017

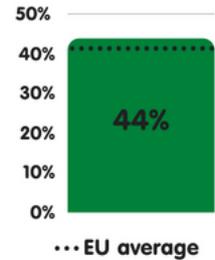


PESCO projects

Participant



Trust in EU



What does the country fear?

Due to the movement of large numbers of refugees and other migrants through Hungary in 2015, Hungarian leaders perceive uncontrolled migration as one of the most significant threats to national security. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán often links migrants and refugees to Islam and terrorism. Hungary also perceives major threats from: cyber attacks; terrorism; disruptions in the energy supply (the country depends on the transit of Russian gas through pipelines in Ukraine); state collapse or civil war in the European Union’s neighbourhood (particularly Ukraine); and external meddling in domestic politics.

Who does the country fear?

Hungarian leaders see jihadists and international criminal organisations as the most threatening actors it faces. The Hungarian government is particularly concerned about instability in the Middle East and north Africa, and the effects this has on migration flows to Europe. Hungary is one of five EU members that do not consider Russia to be a threat (the others are Greece, Cyprus, Italy, and Portugal). Nonetheless, there are fundamental differences on this issue across the political spectrum: left-leaning Hungarian parties see Russia as a threat and criticise Orbán for strengthening ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin. They oppose the expansion of the Paks nuclear plant, fearing that the project will leave Hungary in Russia’s debt. Unlike other EU countries, Hungary is most concerned that the EU and its supporters – rather than Russia or China – will meddle in its domestic politics. Investor George Soros has become the government’s chief adversary in this, as he has clashed with Orbán on issues ranging from migration policy to the rule of law.

Essential security partners

Budapest views Berlin as its most important European security partner. This is due to Germany’s leading role in EU and NATO, as well as its historically close ties with countries in central Europe. Hungary has engaged in extensive military cooperation with Italy, focused on land forces, in the past two decades. Having cooperated within the Visegrád group, Hungary and Poland are close security partners despite their radically different perceptions of the Russian threat. Budapest also sees Vienna as a crucial partner within a central European defence cooperation group that is preparing a joint project for the next round of PESCO. Hungary views the United States as its crucial non-European ally due to the latter’s importance within NATO. American troops are deployed to the Strategic Airlift Capability in Pápa and the NATO Force Integration Unit in Székesfehérvár. However, Hungary’s relations with the US have deteriorated under Orbán.

The EU as a security actor

Having centred its security and defence policy on NATO, Hungary is unenthusiastic about European defence integration, fearing that this will compete with the alliance. Following Donald Trump’s election as US president, Hungary announced that it would spend 2 percent of GDP on defence by 2024, two years earlier than originally planned. While Orbán’s government opposed the deep and narrow version of PESCO that France favours, it welcomed the German-backed broad and inclusive version of the initiative that eventually prevailed. Hungary hopes that PESCO will strengthen European security and defence cooperation, as well as European security capabilities – not least because it believes that the EU should address the refugee crisis by defending its borders.