The Presidential Election in Hungary:
The EU's Election Meddling against Viktor Orban

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[Comments in brackets are Dr Johnson's]

Three weeks out from the most consequential European election of the year, the EU has aimed every weapon in its arsenal at Hungary, as Brussels prepares for its best shot yet at taking out Prime Minister Viktor Orban with their hand picked candidate, Peter Magyar. His animosity toward the EU establishment runs deep. For more than a decade, the Hungarian prime minister has often been the bloc's sole dissident: railing against its open-door migration policies, embrace of LGBT ideology and the suicidal plan to welcome Ukraine into the Union. Orban has secured "carve-outs" from the EU's anti-Russian sanctions that enabled Hungary to continue purchasing Russian oil, and is currently vetoing a €90 billion loan package for Kiev.

The EU has responded by withholding funds equal to 3.5 percent of Hungary's GDP over his banning of LGBT

propaganda and refusal to accept non-European migrants. With the future of its Ukraine project now on the line, Brussels has pinned its hopes on Peter Magyar and his Tisza party, which promises to overturn Orban's domestic reforms and Budapest's opposition to the EU's designs in Ukraine and beyond.

1.

'Plan B'

After the European Council failed to find a work-around to Orban's veto at a March 19 meeting, the EU's chief diplomat, Kaja Kallas, hinted that work was underway on a Plan B. Based on the strategy playing out in Budapest, Plan B clearly involves a full-scale campaign of censorship and subversion to influence Hungary's April elections. On March 16, European Commission spokesperson Thomas Regnier quietly announced that the EU had activated its Rapid Response System (RRS) to "combat potential Russian online disinformation campaigns" in the run-up to the Hungarian election. The mechanism will be active until one week after the vote. While most Europeans have never heard of this system, the RRS has been a key tool in the EU censorship arsenal for years. It empowers EU-approved "fact-checkers" to flag online content as "disinformation" and request its removal from platforms.

Theoretically, platforms such as Meta and TikTok participate in the system voluntarily. All major social media companies have to sign up to the EU's "Code of Practice on Disinformation." However, a trove of documents published by the US House Judiciary Committee in Washington this year revealed that these companies were threatened – often explicitly – with punishment under the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA). The DSA is now in force, giving Brussels' fact-checkers the final say over what constitutes "disinformation" ahead of the election.

These fact-checkers *[who remain anonymous, of course]* favor Magyar. Over four European elections in which the Rapid Response System was activated, the Judiciary Committee found that fact-checkers "almost exclusively targeted" right-wing and populist candidates and organizations. "Moreover, the requirement that these fact-checkers be approved by the European Commission creates a clear structural incentive for the participants to censor Euroskeptic opinion and content."

2. The effect of the EU Digital Services Act

Hungarian MEP Dora David, a former Meta employee and member of Magyar's Tisza party, boasted last year that "we've seen companies change their behavior" based

on the threat of DSA enforcement, citing Meta's removal of pro-Orban content as an example. The "fact-checkers" can count on sympathetic staff within the social media companies. After several members of Orban's Fidesz party claimed that Meta has already started restricting the reach of their Facebook posts, commentators Joey Mannarino and Philip Pilkington identified Oskar Braszczynski as the employee likely responsible. Braszczynski, who works as Meta's "Government and Social Impact Partner for Central and Eastern Europe," has shared pro-Ukraine, anti-Orban, and pro-LGBT content on his personal social media accounts.

Fidesz [Orban's party] MEP Csaba Domotor said in Brussels on March 18: "The European Commission is outsourcing the task of content moderation to so-called external civil society actors, all of whom have a progressive orientation." Regarding Braszczynski's role in the censorship program, Zoltan Kovacs, a spokesman for Orban's office, said that having "a highly politicized figure overseeing the region undermines platform neutrality and raises questions about potential interference in Hungary's election" [Gee, you think so?]

3. Romania and TikTok

The links between Magyar's party and Meta may streamline the EU's censorship efforts, but Brussels is not

above strong-arming platforms that refuse to play by its rules. This exact scenario played out in Romania in 2024, when Euroskeptic candidate Calin Georgescu won a "shock" first-round victory. Romanian and EU authorities immediately and without evidence declared that Russia had interfered in the election and had run a coordinated campaign on TikTok to help Georgescu win, and the election was annulled.

The day after the annulment, TikTok wrote to the European Commission stating that it had found no evidence of a Russian-linked campaign in support of Georgescu, and that it had in fact been asked to censor pro-Georgescu content by authorities in Bucharest. This content included "disrespectful" posts that "insult the [ruling] PSD party." The commission pressed forward and demanded that TikTok make "changes to its processes, controls, and systems for the monitoring and detection of any systemic risks." Threatened with legal action, TikTok rewrote its terms of service to ban "misinformation that undermines public trust, media presented out of context and misrepresentation of authoritative information."

Ten days later, and despite its compliance, the EU opened formal proceedings against the platform for "a suspected breach of the Digital Services Act (DSA) in relation to TikTok's obligation to properly assess and mitigate systemic risks linked to election integrity." In Hungary

and Romania – and in elections in France, Germany and Moldova – the EU has used the threat of "Russian online disinformation campaigns" to justify its activation of the Rapid Response System.

Before the DSA, the EU counted on platforms adhering to its "voluntary" codes of conduct, but the Act made these agreements legally binding. It allows the EU to fine tech platforms up to six percent of their global annual turnover if they fail to restrict the "dissemination of illegal content and address the spread of disinformation." Under the Act, the EU has pressured platforms to censor content ahead of national elections in Slovakia, the Netherlands, France, Moldova, Romania and Ireland, and during the EU elections in June 2024. Platforms that failed to remove this content would be punished with "enforcement actions" under the DSA.

4. 'Russian election fixers' in Hungary and EU wiretapping

Just over a week before Regnier announced the activation of the RSS, journalists at the Polish nonprofit Vsquare claimed to have "uncovered evidence" that [Russian](#) "election fixers" were working in Hungary to swing the election for Orban [so far, no evidence has been provided, nor will it be]. The outlet claims that Russian President Vladimir Putin had dispatched "a team of political

technologists" from Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, to Budapest, where working under diplomatic cover at the Russian Embassy, they are likely running "vote-buying networks, troll farms and on-the-ground influence campaigns."

The shadow campaign to swing the Hungarian election against Viktor Orban has escalated with the [wiretapping](#) of Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto. . . In an audio file released by [Hungarian](#) journal *Mandiner* on Monday, opposition journalist Szabolcs Panyi can be heard telling a source how he passed Szijjarto's phone number to "a state organ of an EU country." Once they had this number, he explained, agents of this country were able to extract "information about who that number spoke to, and they see who is calling that number or who that number is calling."

In a Facebook post on Monday, Panyi confirmed that he was the person on the recording. He said that he was asking his source whether she knew of any alternate numbers used by Szijjarto or Lavrov, "so that I could compare them with information received from the national security service of a European country." Panyi's confession explained how the "European security officials" were able to track Szijjarto's phone conversations before feeding the information to *Politico* and the *Washington Post.*

5. Orban's response

Orban immediately announced an investigation into the wiretapping, saying: "We are dealing with two serious issues. There is evidence that Hungary's foreign minister was wiretapped, and we also have indications of who may be behind it." Szijjarto explained that as the EU's longest-serving foreign minister, he regularly speaks to Lavrov with messages from his colleagues in the EU. The real scandal, he said "is that a Hungarian journalist is colluding with foreign secret services in order to wiretap a member of the Hungarian government. What makes this case even worse is that this Hungarian journalist is friends with the inner circles of the [opposition] Tisza party."

The report cites "multiple European national security sources," without disclosing any further details or names. Magyar has repeated these claims in his speeches. After the Szijjarto story broke, he accused the foreign minister of "betraying Hungarian and European interests," and threatened him with "life imprisonment" for treason, should his Tisza party win the election.

Almost all of Vsquare's published work – which includes investigations tying Orban's government to Russian intelligence, as well as hit pieces on populist leaders

Robert Fico in Slovakia and Andrej Babis in the Czech Republic – is based on information provided by unnamed "European intelligence Agencies," and interviews with NGOs. It is, of course, funded by grants from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and financed by USAID, the German Marshall Fund of the United States and two EU-backed journalism funds.

Whatever the role these agencies played in concocting the "Russian interference" story, it served the dual purpose of giving the EU an excuse to switch on its censorship machine and giving Magyar "political ammunition" against Orban. Magyar laughably stated at a rally in Pecs on March 8: "Agents of Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU, are stationed in Budapest under diplomatic cover to influence the elections. " He then led the crowd in chanting "Russians, go home!"

6. Fixing the polls

Magyar allegedly holds a nine-point lead over Orban, according to an aggregate of polls compiled by *Politico* [which means nothing]. However, the polling organizations showing the clearest advantage to Magyar are those affiliated with the opposition or funded by the EU: the 21 Research Center, which is financed by the European Commission, has Tisza leading Fidesz 49 percent to 37 percent; the IDEA Institute, which has

accepted EU and NED money, shows Magyar's party leading 48 percent to 38 percent; Median, which was founded by a member of the liberal SZDSZ party linked to the opposition HVG newspaper, shows Tisza beating Fidesz by 55 percent to 35 percent [Why are so many liberals running polling agencies? Polls do not reflect public opinion, they create it]. Keep in mind that Magyar, in his unsuccessful campaign for the EU legislature in 2024, received 30 percent of the vote.

Despite the rosy polling, "many" EU leaders secretly believe that an Orban victory is "likely," *Politico* has reported. Hungarian EU Affairs Minister Janos Boka told them that he believes that by sponsoring one-sided polling, Magyar and his allies in Brussels are "building the narrative that if they lose the election, then this is an illegitimate result." The fact that the European Commission extended its RSS measures until one week after election day is no coincidence. The EU is preparing to fight a long and bloody battle to win its decade-long war on Orban and bring Hungary back under its control.