

Russia after Orbán's defeat: putting a brave face on a difficult situation

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Russia's initial official reactions to the opposition's electoral triumph in Hungary have been largely calm and pragmatic, although Vladimir Putin has not congratulated the winner. When asked about this, the Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov explained that the reason was Hungary's status as an 'unfriendly' country participating in anti-Russian sanctions.

At the same time, Peskov stated that the Kremlin respects the choice of the Hungarian people and hopes for continued cooperation with the new government. He stressed that Russia and Hungary are engaged in a number of joint projects, the completion of which is in the interest of both sides.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has declared Moscow's readiness to build relations with the new government in Budapest on the basis of equality, mutual benefit, and a balance of interests, while making clear that Russia's approach will depend on Hungary's concrete actions.

Aleksei Pushkov, head of the Federation Council's media commission and one of the country's leading commentators on international affairs, has stated that Péter Magyar's victory marks the definitive end of Western unity, as it runs counter to Washington's preferences.

Commentary

- **In the wake of Viktor Orbán's defeat, Russia has focused on downplaying the significance and potential consequences of the change of power in Hungary,** particularly with regard to the continuation of the war in Ukraine. Representatives of Russia's political class and commentators close to the Kremlin have emphasised that the Hungarian opposition's victory amounts to little more than a tactical success for 'Brussels', which, in their view, do not resolve the fundamental problems that condemn the European Union to failure in its confrontation with Russia. They have also argued that the election winner, Péter Magyar, is no more supportive of Ukraine than the outgoing Prime Minister Orbán; that the policy line of the future Hungarian government remains unclear, and that the incoming prime minister is highly likely to continue the existing policy of pragmatic economic cooperation with Russia, albeit with some symbolic adjustments.
- **At the same time, Russian officials and commentators are forecasting a definitive breakdown in relations between Europe and the Trump administration.** In their view, Orbán's removal from power in Hungary signifies the country's shift into the pro-EU

political mainstream in Europe, which will further deepen divisions between the European Union and the United States. They also anticipate that the defeat of a politician openly supported by the Trump administration – as illustrated by Vice President J.D. Vance's visit to Budapest in the days preceding the election – will further worsen the atmosphere in transatlantic relations, to Moscow's benefit. It is reasonable to assume that Russia will actively seek to exacerbate this deterioration, using both official and propaganda channels to target the United States with messaging portraying Orbán's defeat as the result of alleged pressure and manipulation by the Brussels establishment.

- **The propaganda line adopted by Moscow, which downplays the significance of the change of power in Budapest, contrasts sharply with the Kremlin's pre-election messaging,** which portrayed the Hungarian election as an event of fundamental importance for Russia's relations with the West. This suggests that Moscow is now seeking to conceal its disappointment at the defeat of a politician whom it regarded as the leading figure among those political forces in Europe willing to halt support for Ukraine in order to bring the Russia-Ukraine war to an end. The growing influence of these forces – following the victories of Robert Fico in Slovakia and Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic – constituted an important factor in the Kremlin's political calculations, underpinning its belief in an eventual victory over Ukraine. Orbán's defeat has disrupted this trend and undermined the prospects for the implementation of Russia's strategy.