



Report

HUNGARY'S EUROPEAN RESET? IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU AND THE FUTURE OF V4 COOPERATION

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About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think tank focused on European integration and cohesion. It contributes to strengthening democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe, while also supporting the active engagement of the Czech Republic within the European Union.

EUROPEUM conducts original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and develops new ideas and policy recommendations aimed at improving both national and European decision-making processes.



*The EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, in cooperation with the Think Visegrad Platform, organised a roundtable discussion entitled Hungary's European Reset? Implications for the EU and the Future of V4 Cooperation on **15 July 2026** at the EUROPEUM Brussels Office in Brussels. The event brought together policymakers and experts from European institutions and leading Central European think tanks to discuss the implications of Hungary's political transition for its relationship with the European Union, democratic governance, and the future of regional cooperation within the Visegrád Four.*

*The discussion featured **Judit Rozsa** (Director of the Technical Support Instrument Unit, DG REFORM, European Commission), **Júlia Pőcze** (Researcher, CEPS – Centre for European Policy Studies), **Andrzej Sadecki** (Head of the Central European Department, OSW – Centre for Eastern Studies), and **Tomáš Strážay** (Director of the Research Center, Slovak Foreign Policy Association). The discussion was moderated by **Martin Vokálek**, Executive Director of the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy.*

Main Points of the Discussion

- Participants agreed that **Hungary's political transition presents** an opportunity to restore trust in democratic institutions, rebuild the rule of law, and strengthen the country's relationship with the European Union.
- The discussion highlighted that while the **new government enjoys favourable political conditions**, including a constitutional majority, rebuilding institutions will be considerably more challenging than adopting new legislation.
- Several speakers emphasised **that accountability and anti-corruption efforts** will be essential for maintaining public confidence and demonstrating that democratic reforms are producing tangible results.
- Participants stressed the importance of **restoring Hungary's credibility within the European Union** through the effective implementation of rule-of-law reforms, rather than through political commitments alone. The release of frozen EU funds was seen as both a symbol of renewed trust and an important driver of structural reform.
- The discussion underscored that implementation, rather than legislation itself, will represent the greatest challenge, particularly in areas such as public procurement, institutional governance, and public administration.
- Speakers agreed that **Hungary's foreign policy is likely to become more constructive**, with renewed engagement in the European Union, improved relations with Ukraine and neighbouring countries, and a less confrontational approach to regional cooperation.
- Participants argued that support for **Hungarian minorities abroad is expected to remain** an important element of government policy, although

it should become less instrumental in domestic political competition and more closely linked to regional cooperation.

- Several speakers viewed the revival of **the Visegrád Four as an opportunity to promote practical regional cooperation** rather than political confrontation. The future relevance of the V4 was seen as depending on its ability to advance concrete regional priorities while contributing constructively to European policymaking.

Key Recommendations

1. **Prioritise the effective implementation of rule-of-law** and anti-corruption reforms alongside legislative changes.
2. **Restore public confidence by ensuring transparent** and credible accountability while preserving institutional continuity within the public administration.
3. **Rebuild Hungary's relationship with the European Union** through consistent implementation of agreed reforms and constructive engagement with European partners.
4. **Develop a balanced regional policy** that strengthens cooperation with neighbouring countries while continuing to support Hungarian minority communities.
5. **Revitalise the Visegrád Four as a pragmatic platform** for advancing shared regional interests through concrete policy initiatives and practical cooperation within the European Union.

The discussion examined the prospects and challenges facing Hungary's new government following its electoral victory after sixteen years of Fidesz rule. It focused on whether the incoming administration would be able to translate its ambitious campaign promises into concrete reforms while addressing the deep political, institutional, and economic legacies of the previous government. Particular attention was devoted to the government's capacity to restore the rule of law, rebuild democratic institutions, strengthen public services, and reinforce public trust in state institutions. The debate also explored how the new leadership could balance high domestic expectations with the demands of implementing structural reforms, while at the same time rebuilding Hungary's relationships with its European partners and restoring the country's credibility within the European Union.

Hungary's Reform Agenda and Democratic Transition

The first speaker outlined three broad priorities for the new government. The first concerned restoring justice in its broadest sense, including rebuilding the rule of law, strengthening accountability, recovering misused public assets, and restoring media freedom. The second focused on healthcare and education, which were described as sectors requiring comprehensive reform. The third priority was restoring economic growth, particularly by unlocking suspended EU funds.

While investigations involving several local officials had already begun, there was growing impatience among citizens, who expected prominent figures associated with the previous government to face legal consequences.

According to the speaker, these resources are important not only because of their financial value but also because they can support long-term structural reforms and economic modernisation.

Nevertheless, the speaker acknowledged that implementing reforms across several policy areas would likely represent one of the government's greatest challenges.

Building on this, another speaker addressed public expectations regarding accountability. While investigations involving several local officials had already begun, the speaker noted growing impatience among citizens who expect prominent figures associated with the previous government to face legal consequences. It was argued that maintaining public confidence during the government's initial period in office would largely depend on demonstrating tangible progress in anti-corruption efforts.

The discussion then shifted to the foreign policy dimension of Hungary's transition. One speaker emphasised the importance of rebuilding relations with Ukraine and restoring Hungary's position within the European Union. Particular attention was given to separating minority rights from bilateral political disputes to ensure that these issues no longer hinder Ukraine's EU accession process. At the same time, the speaker argued that Hungary's future approach towards Russia, particularly regarding energy dependence, would provide an important indication of the country's broader foreign policy direction.

The final intervention in the opening round focused on the government's capacity to implement reform. The speaker argued that the new administration benefits from favourable institutional conditions, including a strong electoral mandate and a two-thirds parliamentary majority. Attention was also drawn to the government's technocratic

New administration enters office from a position of considerable institutional strength, backed by a strong electoral mandate and a two-thirds parliamentary majority, providing it with a rare opportunity to pursue far-reaching

composition, with several ministers bringing significant policy expertise. At the same time, the speaker questioned what political and institutional framework would ultimately replace the structures established during the Orbán era. Particular concern was expressed about the manner in which reforms are being implemented, including constitutional amendments and proposals affecting parliamentary mandates.

Responding to the moderator's follow-up question on institutional reform, several speakers agreed that replacing legislation is considerably easier than rebuilding institutions. They pointed to independent bodies, regulatory authorities, and senior public administration positions that continue to be occupied by officials appointed under the previous government. At the same time, participants cautioned against politically motivated dismissals of career civil servants, arguing that institutional continuity should be preserved wherever possible. As one speaker noted, dismantling a system developed over sixteen years cannot realistically be achieved within only a few months.

The discussion subsequently turned to the regional implications of Hungary's political transition. One speaker argued that relations with Slovakia would inevitably change following the end of the close political relationship between Viktor Orbán and Robert Fico, while another highlighted the improvement in relations with Poland. The new Hungarian Prime Minister's first official foreign visit to Poland was presented as a symbolic indication of changing regional dynamics. Nevertheless, participants agreed that the long-term success of this rapprochement would depend on whether Hungary's political signals are accompanied by concrete policy changes, particularly regarding relations with Russia and energy policy.

Institutional Staffing and Administrative Continuity

The moderator then opened the floor to questions from the audience, encouraging participants to continue the discussion in a more interactive format. The discussion first turned to the composition of the Hungarian public administration and the challenge of ensuring institutional continuity following the change of government. One participant argued that many officials who had served under the previous government were motivated primarily by professional rather than ideological considerations. The rapid adjustment of public institutions following the election was presented as evidence that parts of the administration and judiciary were capable of adapting quickly to the new political environment.

As an example, the participant referred to the swift termination of several politically sensitive legal proceedings following the election. It was therefore argued that the new government should avoid replacing large parts of the public administration, as many experienced officials could continue serving under the new leadership.

Responding to this point, one speaker distinguished between career civil servants and senior institutional leaders. While opposing politically motivated dismissals of public officials, the speaker argued that individuals occupying key leadership positions should possess sufficient public credibility to oversee the democratic transformation of state institutions. At the same time, the speaker acknowledged that distinguishing between politically compromised officials and professional civil servants would be far from straightforward, given the close relationship between political loyalty and career advancement under the previous system.

Rule-of-Law Restoration and the Risks of “Shock Therapy”

The discussion then turned to the government's rapid approach to institutional reform and the potential risks associated with this process. Referring to Poland's

experience with restoring the rule of law, one audience member questioned whether Hungary was pursuing a form of political and constitutional "shock therapy" that could create future challenges.

The participant asked whether presenting the Orbán era as fundamentally illegitimate, together with some of its institutions and officeholders, might eventually place Hungary on a collision course with the European Union over democratic standards and the rule of law.

Responding to this concern, one speaker identified political self-restraint as one of the government's greatest tests. While the new administration benefits from a two-thirds parliamentary majority and a weak opposition, the speaker argued that these favourable conditions also place greater responsibility on the government to exercise its mandate with caution.

Although acknowledging that certain institutional reforms required immediate action, the speaker argued that this exceptional approach could not become the norm. Particular attention was drawn to electoral reform, which was described as one of the most important tests of the government's commitment to democratic renewal. While the existing electoral system was widely considered to require reform, changing it would also run against the government's own political interests.

The constitutional reform process could provide an important opportunity to reduce political polarisation, broaden public involvement, and strengthen the democratic legitimacy of Hungary's future institutional framework.

Building on this, another speaker argued that the Prime Minister's confrontational style of communication remained popular because it reflected years of public frustration with the previous government. However, with only limited parliamentary opposition

remaining, the speaker warned that this approach could undermine constructive democratic debate if maintained over the longer term.

The discussion concluded with reflections on the preparation of a new constitution. Participants noted that the government had expressed its intention to replace the existing Fundamental Law through a more inclusive process involving public participation and a referendum. According to several speakers, the constitutional reform process could provide an important opportunity to reduce political polarisation, broaden public involvement, and strengthen the democratic legitimacy of Hungary's future institutional framework.

Rebuilding Trust with the European Union

The associated reforms—particularly in the areas of the rule of law, anti-corruption, and public administration—should be viewed not simply as conditions for accessing funding but as reforms that are in Hungary's own long-term interest.

The discussion then turned to Hungary's relationship with the European Union and the steps required to restore trust following years of tensions with European institutions. Participants agreed that while the political atmosphere had improved significantly after the election, the new government would need to demonstrate its commitment through concrete reforms rather than political declarations alone. Several speakers emphasised that

securing the release of frozen EU funds would represent an important early success, both symbolically and economically. At the same time, they stressed that the associated reforms—particularly in the areas of the rule of law, anti-corruption, and public administration—should be viewed not simply as conditions for accessing funding but as reforms that are in Hungary's own long-term interest.

While most participants expressed confidence that the necessary legislative changes could be adopted, they identified effective implementation, especially in areas such as public procurement, as the principal challenge.

The discussion also highlighted the broader shift in Hungary's position within the European Union. Speakers argued that the country had already adopted a more constructive approach, no longer acting as a consistent obstacle to EU decision-making on issues such as security, Ukraine, and enlargement. This change was reflected in improving perceptions of Hungary in Brussels, where participants observed a noticeable shift from scepticism towards cautious optimism following the change of government.

Looking ahead, participants suggested that the new administration remained broadly committed to European integration but had yet to articulate a comprehensive long-term vision for Hungary's role within the European Union. While its immediate focus remained on domestic transformation, several speakers pointed to stronger engagement with European institutions and the government's commitment to joining the eurozone as indications of a more pro-European orientation.

Revival of the Visegrád Four

The discussion concluded with reflections on the future of regional cooperation and the role of Central Europe within the European Union. Participants considered whether the political changes in Hungary could contribute to a revival of the Visegrád Four (V4) following several years of limited political cooperation.

Several speakers argued that the V4 was already showing signs of renewed activity, pointing to resumed high-level meetings and closer coordination on selected European issues. At the same time, they suggested that the group was unlikely to return to its previous role as a counterweight within the EU. Instead,

the V4 was expected to evolve into a more pragmatic platform for promoting shared regional interests in areas such as the EU budget, energy, infrastructure, agriculture, and security. Some participants also viewed more flexible forms of regional cooperation, including a "V4 Plus" format, as a realistic complement to existing initiatives.

Building on this, participants emphasised that the long-term relevance of the V4 would depend less on political declarations and more on its ability to deliver practical results through concrete regional projects and coordinated policy initiatives. While acknowledging that differences among member states would remain, speakers argued that cooperation should focus on areas of common interest rather than become a source of confrontation within the European Union.

In the final round, speakers reflected more broadly on the future role of Central Europe. Despite differing perspectives, participants shared a cautiously optimistic outlook, arguing that the region has an opportunity to become a more constructive and influential actor within the European Union. Rather than relying on vetoes or obstruction, Central European countries were encouraged to contribute more actively to European policymaking while continuing to represent their shared regional interests. The discussion concluded that rebuilding trust, strengthening regional cooperation, and translating common priorities into practical initiatives would be essential for achieving this objective.

The moderator closed the roundtable by thanking the speakers and participants for their contributions and inviting the discussion to continue informally.