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From Orbán to Magyar:

A New Era in Hungarian Politics

By

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23 April 2026

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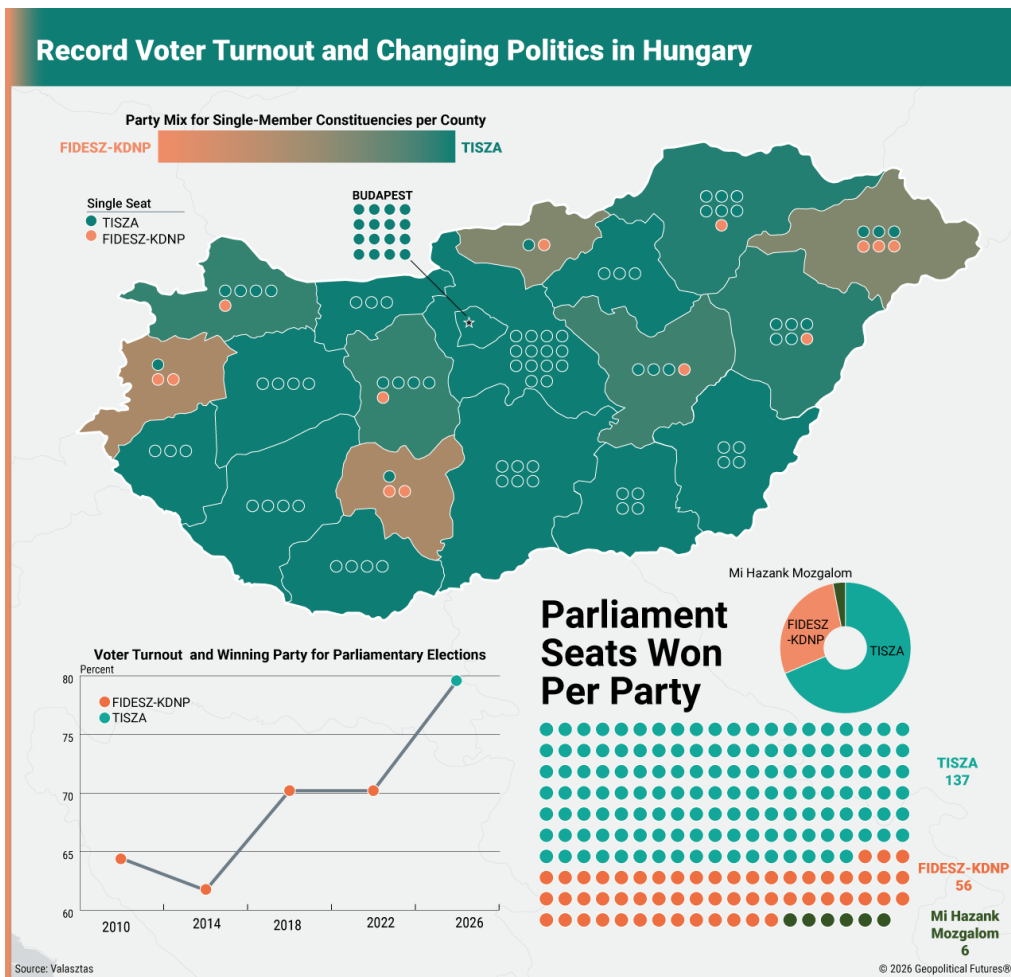
From Orbán to Magyar: A New Era in Hungarian Politics

23 April 2026

Executive Summary

- ✦ Hungary’s 2026 election represented a decisive political shift ending Viktor Orbán’s long rule and giving Péter Magyar’s Tisza Party a powerful mandate for systemic change.
- ✦ The vote was a clear choice between continued nationalist, centralised governance and a return to rule-of-law reforms and closer alignment with the EU and NATO.
- ✦ The new government faces major external and geopolitical implications including stronger support for Ukraine and improved relations with European partners.
- ✦ Significant economic and institutional challenges remain including fiscal adjustment, unlocking EU funds, and dismantling entrenched political networks.

Key Picture: Hungary’s Landmark Election



Source: [GPF](#)

1. Hungary's New Political Direction

In a historic shift on April 12, 2026, Hungary experienced its most dramatic political transformation in decades. Péter Magyar and his Tisza Party achieved a sweeping election victory that dismantled Viktor Orbán's 16-year administration. With a massive voter turnout approaching 80%, the opposition didn't just win - they secured a supermajority, granting them the power to overhaul the country's institutions and realign Hungary with the European Union.¹ As such, the election has fundamentally rearranged the geopolitical landscape of Central Europe, ousting the European Union's longest-serving illiberal leader, Viktor Orbán. By replacing the Fidesz government with the centre-right Tisza Party, Hungarian voters have not only opted for domestic change but have also signaled a major realignment with NATO and the EU, likely ending years of diplomatic friction over Ukraine and the rule of law.²

The election was essentially a referendum on what kind of state Hungary should be after 16 years of Orbán's rule: Orbán and Fidesz argued for continuity, stressing national sovereignty, anti-immigration policies, family support, and a foreign policy less tightly aligned with Brussels, while also portraying the vote as a choice about keeping Hungary out of deeper involvement in the war in Ukraine.³ Their main challenger was Magyar's Tisza Party, a centre-right force that campaigned on restoring checks and balances, strengthening judicial independence, fighting corruption, and re-anchoring Hungary more firmly in the EU and NATO. After the vote, Magyar said the result showed that Hungarians wanted to be anchored in Europe and promised constitutional and institutional change.⁴

This was an extraordinary victory, succeeding despite the complex web of state institutions, media dominance, and electoral rules Orbán had designed to ensure his grip on power. Crucially, the integrity of the ballot count remained unaffected by political interference.⁵ The integrity of the ballot count was defended by a widespread network of volunteer poll watchers who mobilised to prevent traditional forms of rural voter manipulation and "vote-buying."⁶ This domestic vigilance was bolstered by a formal International Election Observation Mission from the OSCE, which monitored the technical aspects of the registration and voting processes to ensure they remained professional and inclusive.⁷

1.1. What Magyar's Win Means Politically

Consequences for EU and NATO

The departure of Orbán removes a major obstacle to European support for Ukraine, as Prime Minister-elect Magyar intends to approve the previously blocked 90 billion euro loan and support new sanctions against Russia. While the Tisza party remains hesitant to provide direct military personnel or weaponry, Magyar's commitment to purging Russian influence and his push for a 5% GDP defense spending target is expected to isolate dissenters like Slovakia and foster a more cohesive NATO-EU alliance. Although Hungary's reliance on Russian energy remains a challenge, the new administration aims to gradually diversify its supply with European assistance, signalling a significant pivot toward Western security and diplomatic integration.⁸

The US and Donald Trump

Departing from the diplomatic convention of maintaining neutrality during foreign democratic elections, high-ranking United States officials, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance, visited Budapest during the campaign. Vice President Vance's presence at events alongside Viktor Orbán, complemented by a remote appearance from Donald Trump, emphasised the close ties between the two administrations. For years, the Fidesz party had dedicated significant resources to fostering relationships with American ideological allies who viewed Orbán's governance as a model for European nationalism. Ultimately, however, these international endorsements and long-term political investments proved insufficient to prevent a decisive electoral defeat for the Fidesz party.⁹

International Reactions

International reactions to Magyar's victory have been characterised by widespread enthusiasm across the EU, with leaders framing the result as a restoration of Hungary's European identity. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk celebrated the win as a strengthening of the Union, while others, such as Keir Starmer and Emmanuel Macron, hailed it as a historic milestone for European democracy. While right-wing figures like Giorgia Meloni maintained a diplomatic tone by thanking Viktor Orbán for their past collaboration while wishing Magyar success, the broader consensus among EU heads of state, including Friedrich Merz, was one of eager anticipation for renewed cooperation. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed a cautious readiness to advance bilateral relations and work toward regional stability, despite the new administration's indicated intention to maintain certain restrictions regarding military aid.¹⁰

1.2. Economic Consequences

The decisive mandate for regime change has significantly lowered short-term policy uncertainty, fuelling expectations for swift institutional repairs and a restoration of fiscal credibility. In the immediate future, Magyar is expected to generate positive momentum by prioritising diplomatic reconciliation with the EU and neighboring Visegrád Group partners. However, the path to unlocking EU funds may be longer than anticipated due to a profound lack of institutional trust stemming from past espionage allegations. Even with a constitutional supermajority, the government may find the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) deadlines too restrictive to meet the rigorous requirements for genuine reform beyond mere symbolic measures.¹¹

On the domestic front, the administration faces the urgent task of establishing a new macroeconomic baseline to restructure a budget that no longer reflects current realities. While the dismantling of inherited economic policies might cause fiscal metrics to weaken in the short term, the first 100 days are expected to serve as a grace period, likely keeping sovereign credit ratings stable through June. Additionally, by setting a clear target date for euro adoption, the Tisza party could secure the market confidence necessary to begin the multi-term process of structural economic transformation.¹²

Addressing the national budget will also be an immediate and critical challenge, as the deficit reached nearly 50% of its annual limit by February 2026. To comply with EU fiscal rules and secure access to frozen funds, the government must implement a credible fiscal adjustment of approximately 1.7% of GDP, navigating the aftermath of heavy pre-election spending by the previous regime. To fund its ambitious agenda without raising broad taxes, the Tisza Party plans to achieve significant savings by eliminating overpriced public procurement and wasteful "prestige" investments. With general public service spending currently at 10% of GDP, the administration believes there is substantial room to redirect these funds into more productive sectors.¹³

2. What To Expect From The Next Government?

The victory of the Tisza Party signals a comprehensive overhaul of the Hungarian state. Based on the party's manifesto, the incoming administration is expected to launch wide-ranging reforms across almost all sectors, moving away from previous governance models to reshape the nation's future.¹⁴

The incoming administration led by Magyar is expected to prioritise the restoration of the rule of law and the independence of state institutions. Using its constitutional supermajority, the Tisza Party plans to dismantle the "illiberal" framework by replacing political appointees in the judiciary, prosecution, and media authorities.¹⁵ A central goal of this domestic agenda is a rigorous crackdown on corruption, including joining the European Public Prosecutor's Office.¹⁶ Additionally, the government intends to shift resources toward long-neglected public services, specifically targeting improvements in healthcare, education, and social support.¹⁷

In terms of foreign policy, Hungary is expected to pivot toward pro-European integration and mend strained relations with Brussels to unlock nearly €19 billion in frozen EU funds.¹⁸ In addition, relations with NATO and EU are expected to strengthen as Magyar has emphasised Hungary's role as a reliable ally within the Western bloc.¹⁹

The administration plans to end the "demonisation" of Ukraine, though it remains firm on a measured approach to enlargement; while supporting Ukraine's efforts, it will not fast-track their EU membership and intends to put the final decision on accession to a national referendum.²⁰

In the broader perspective, the outcome of the 2026 Hungarian general election marks not just a domestic political turnover but the beginning of a complex transition period, in which Magyar and his government will be tested on their ability to translate a sweeping electoral mandate into durable institutional reform and economic stabilisation. While early signals have been welcomed internationally, analysts caution that rebuilding trust with European partners, restructuring public finances, and dismantling entrenched political networks will require sustained effort over several years. For example, independent analysis from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlights the need for institutional reforms and improved governance to sustain long-term growth.²¹

NOTES

¹ Ashifa Kassam and Flora Garamvolgyi, “Hungarian opposition ousts Viktor Orbán after 16 years in power”, *The Guardian*, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/apr/12/viktor-orban-concedes-defeat-as-opposition-wins-hungarian-election>.

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⁵ Nigel Gould-Davies, “Hungary’s election: significance and implications”, IISS, accessed 20 April 2026,

⁶ ““Vampires don’t like sunlight” – how volunteer poll watchers stopped the vote-buying machine”, Atlaszo, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://english.atlatszo.hu/2026/04/17/vampires-dont-like-sunlight-how-volunteer-poll-watchers-stopped-the-vote-buying-machine/>.

⁷ “Statement of preliminary findings and conclusions”, OSCE, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/election-observation/election-observation-statements/hungary/statements-12/5497-2026-parliamentary-eng/file>.

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⁹ “Experts react: Hungary just voted out Viktor Orbán. Here’s what to expect in Europe and beyond”, Atlantic Council, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/hungary-just-voted-out-viktor-orban-heres-what-to-expect-in-europe-and-beyond/>.

¹⁰ Ashifa Kassam and Flora Garamvolgyi, “Hungarian opposition ousts Viktor Orbán after 16 years in power”, *The Guardian*.

¹¹ Peter Virovacz and Frantisek Taborsky, “What next for Hungary as opposition beats Orbán by a landslide”, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://think.ing.com/articles/hungary-elections-orban-peter-magyar-tisza-budapest-viktor/>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Zsolt Darvas, “Hungary’s new beginning – under tight fiscal constraints”, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.bruegel.org/first-glance/hungarys-new-beginning-under-tight-fiscal-constraints>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Zselyke Csaky, “What Orbán’s departure means for Hungary and for Europe”, CER, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://www.cer.eu/insights/what-orbans-departure-means-hungary-and-europe>.

¹⁶ “Magyar pledges to join European Public Prosecutor’s Office in anti-corruption push”, TVP World, accessed 20 April 2026, <https://tvpworld.com/92620658/pter-magyarsignals-anti-corruption-reforms-with-epo-membership-plan>.

¹⁷ Zsolt Darvas, “Hungary’s new beginning – under tight fiscal constraints”.

¹⁸ “A wind of change for Hungary”, Allianz, accessed 20 April 2026, https://www.allianz-trade.com/en_global/news-insights/economic-insights/A-wind-of-change-for-Hungary.html.

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