

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 565

Condemning democratic backsliding in Hungary.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. TILLIS, Mr. CARDIN, and Mr. DURBIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Condemning democratic backsliding in Hungary.

Whereas Hungary transitioned to a democracy in 1989 following decades of ruthless repression by the Soviet Union, including the brutal suppression of the Revolution of 1956 in which thousands of Hungarians were killed;

Whereas Hungary formally joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on March 12, 1999, signaling a commitment to transatlantic unity and democratic resilience;

Whereas, as part of obligations to transatlantic security as a member of NATO, Hungary has sent troops to Kosovo and Afghanistan, contributes to the Baltic air policing mission, and leads Operation Althea, the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR);

Whereas Viktor Orban first assumed the office of the Prime Minister of Hungary in 1998 and, while in office, restricted the number of plenary sessions held by the Parliament of Hungary, limiting oversight of the government;

Whereas the Government of Hungary has used migration, the COVID-19 crisis, and the war against Ukraine by the Russian Federation to justify ongoing “states of emergency” in Hungary that allow the Orban cabinet to rule by decree, bypassing the parliament;

Whereas, following the tenure of Orban as Leader of the Opposition from 2002 to 2010, Orban again assumed the office of the Prime Minister of Hungary following the parliamentary elections success of the Fidesz party;

Whereas the Orban government passed a new constitution for Hungary in 2011, which limited the power of independent institutions in Hungary, including the Constitutional Court and the judicial system, reduced the number of seats in the National Assembly of Hungary by almost half, restricted civil liberties, and instituted a politicized media regulation authority with power to shut down outlets critical of the government;

Whereas, in 2019, Hungary became the first European Union member state to be downgraded to “partly free” by Freedom House, an internationally recognized non-profit organization, in 2022, the European Parliament ruled that Hungary was no longer considered a full democracy, and in 2023, Transparency International, an internationally recognized non-profit organization, ranked Hungary as the most corrupt European Union member state;

Whereas, in December 2023, Hungary instituted a law purportedly designed to protect the sovereignty of Hungary, but which actually serves as a tool to silence Hungarians who disagree with the current ruling party and has led to infringement proceedings by the European Union;

Whereas the European Union took the unprecedented step of withholding more than \$30,000,000,000 in funds due to concerns about rule of law and corruption in Hungary, and continues to withhold more than \$20,000,000,000 of such funds;

Whereas Hungary has sought to strengthen its relationship with the People's Republic of China, including by participating in the 16+1 format and the Belt and Road Initiative, the first European country to do so;

Whereas, following the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, Prime Minister Orbán and the Government of Hungary has resisted and diluted European Union sanctions with respect to the Russian Federation;

Whereas, in response to the further invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022, Hungary announced support for Ukraine to become a member of the European Union, strengthening European and transatlantic unity at a critical juncture;

Whereas, since February 24, 2022, more than 800,000 refugees have fled Ukraine through Hungary in response to the unprovoked and illegal war in Ukraine initiated by Vladimir Putin, and more than 35,000 Ukrainians have sought to stay in Hungary;

Whereas the Government of Hungary has worked with local partners, including non-governmental organizations, to provide essential services to Ukrainian refugees;

Whereas Hungary has blocked the transfer of weapons from partners and allies to Ukraine through the border that Hungary shares with Ukraine, moved to delay financial assistance from the European Union to Ukraine, and carved out exceptions on European Union sanctions against the Russian Federation to continue to allow Russian oil and gas to flow to Hungary;

Whereas Prime Minister Orban has sought a closer relationship with Vladimir Putin, including by meeting Putin in Beijing in 2023, the first leader of a European Union member state to meet with Putin since April 2022 and the only leader of a NATO member state to meet with Putin since the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022;

Whereas, in response to the war in Ukraine, NATO is the strongest and most unified it has ever been, as exemplified through the enlargement of NATO to include Finland as the 31st member state;

Whereas, despite approving the accession of Finland to NATO on March 27, 2023, Hungary has delayed joining all other NATO member states in approving the accession of Sweden to NATO, failing to fulfill a commitment not to be last to approve such accession and jeopardizing transatlantic security at a key moment for peace and stability in Europe; and

Whereas, on February 26, 2024, the Hungarian Parliament voted in support of the accession of Sweden to NATO:
Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) recognizes the important role Hungary can
3 play in European and transatlantic security;

4 (2) condemns the ongoing democratic back-
5 sliding in Hungary, perpetuated by the closing of
6 civil spaces and the consolidation of power at the
7 highest levels of government, including the restric-
8 tions placed on the judicial system;

9 (3) reaffirms the indispensable role a free and
10 independent media plays in supporting government
11 transparency and democratic accountability, and the
12 efforts of the Government of Hungary to curtail and
13 undermine such activities;

14 (4) urges Hungary to continue working at the
15 bilateral, multilateral, and regional levels on military
16 cooperation, energy independence, and democratic
17 resilience with other democratic actors;

18 (5) expresses concern with the deepening rela-
19 tionship between Hungary, the Russian Federation,
20 and the People’s Republic of China;

21 (6) welcomes the vote of Hungary on February
22 26, 2024, ratifying the accession of Sweden to the
23 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and

24 (7) expresses regret that the Government of
25 Hungary, as the last member of NATO to schedule

1 a vote on the NATO membership of Sweden, unnec-
2 essarily prolonged the accession of Sweden to
3 NATO.

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