

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2026

Dear Secretary Rubio:

I write to express my concern about Hungary's downward democratic trajectory and the implications for U.S. interests in Central Europe. You recently met with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, and I wish that you raised the following concerns directly.

In recent years, democracy in Hungary has significantly eroded. Under Prime Minister Orbán, the election process has become less competitive, and the judiciary is increasingly controlled by the state. Press freedom has declined as advertisers have been strongly discouraged from placing ads in independent outlets, and ownership of key outlets has been consolidated under a foundation exempt from antitrust regulation.

I remain profoundly concerned about Hungary's close relationship with Moscow. Hungary has failed to diversify its energy resources away from Russia. Budapest has allowed Russia to exploit Hungary's "golden visa" system to evade U.S. sanctions. The relocation of the International Investment Bank (the successor to the Cold War institution known as Comecon) from Moscow to Budapest is an exercise in Russian power projection. Despite an extradition request from the United States based on an existing bilateral treaty, Hungary rejected the request and sent two arms dealers to freedom in Moscow.

In addition, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Hungary has repeatedly distinguished itself from other NATO and EU partners by opposing or delaying certain sanctions measures, expanding energy cooperation with Moscow, and maintaining high-level political engagement with the Kremlin. Hungary has continued deep reliance on Russian gas and nuclear cooperation through the Paks II project, and Prime Minister Orbán has publicly criticized elements of the transatlantic sanctions regime.

Given these developments, I am disappointed with your decision to contribute to Hungary's anti-democratic trajectory by overtly campaigning with Prime Minister Orbán. The U.S. proudly supported Hungarian freedom fighters against Soviet invaders in 1956, and we should refrain from giving the impression of imposing a preferred candidate on the Hungarian people as they head to elections 70 years later.

When, as a member of the Senate, you joined Senators in expressing these very same concerns about democratic erosion in Hungary, and Hungary's pro-Russia trajectory it signaled the

seriousness with which many in Congress view the alliance between the United States and Hungary. To that end, I request answers to the following questions:

1. In 2019, you signed a bipartisan letter expressing concern that “democracy in Hungary has significantly eroded,” citing media consolidation, judicial interference, and Hungary’s ties to Moscow. Do you believe those concerns have been resolved? If so, what specific reforms has Prime Minister Orbán enacted to address them?
2. You previously warned that Hungary’s election environment had become “less competitive” and that press freedom had declined. How does appearing publicly with Prime Minister Orbán on the eve of the election help reverse trends towards non-competitive elections?
3. In 2019, you urged candid engagement with Hungarian leadership regarding democratic norms. During your recent trip, did you raise concerns about judicial independence, media pluralism, or civil society restrictions? If so, what was the response?
4. Do you stand by the core premise of your 2019 letter, that erosion of democratic institutions in NATO countries undermines U.S. strategic interests? If so, how does your recent engagement with Prime Minister Orbán advance that principle?

I hope that Hungary will return to its democratic roots and inspiring history. I stand in solidarity with the Hungarian people and urge you to remain true to democratic values that have undergirded U.S. relations with Central and Eastern Europe since the end of the Cold War.

Sincerely,



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Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator