

By

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Policymakers in the West often fail to take a holistic view of security. China and Russia are doing just that as they prosecute warfare below the threshold of overt conventional fighting. This allows China and Russia to actively degrade the security of the United States and the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) without really understanding the effort their adversaries are undertaking.

The recent decision by Hungary's Prime Minister, Victor Orban, to open its borders to Russian and Belarusian immigrants is an example of a NATO member-state failing to see the large security implications of an act that is not directly tied to security. The mistake could, however, have broader implications for Europe.

Hungary's recent decision to implement a liberal immigration policy, allowing Russian and Belarusian citizens to enter as guest workers without vetting or security checks, poses a significant threat because it will allow Russian agents, and there are certainly Russian agents mixed within the larger mass of migrants, to freely move within European Union (EU) member-states. With the policy also allowing guest workers to bring their family with them, without vetting for ties to the Russian military or security services, makes the concern that Russian agents will infiltrate Europe even more likely. Russian efforts to undermine European democracies through disinformation and misinformation is already well known. There is certainly no need to make the problem worse.

This policy flies in the face of an EU ban on [Russian airlines to the Schengen Area](#) (the borderless area inside the EU that does not require a passports for travel) and individual bans of hundreds of people connected to the Kremlin and the War in Ukraine. This is also contrary to the actions of many other EU countries. For example, Finland closed its border with Russia, preventing all immigration, noting serious security concerns.

Hungary did not consult with the EU or NATO. Strangely, this act took place while Orban is serving as the rotational head of the EU. The body is now [considering legislation](#) designed to halt Hungary's immigration policy.

Orban is the only head of an EU or NATO member-state that [maintains ties](#) with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia since Russia's [invasion of Ukraine](#). Orban is sometimes called a pawn of Putin and one of his "useful idiots"—a term used by Soviet leaders to describe unsuspecting collaborators in the West.

However, it is unclear whether or not Orban is aligning himself with Putin because of [ideological similarity](#), [economic necessity](#), or both. During his time in office, Hungary [voted to sanction](#) Russia in the European Parliament and even condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. More recently, however, Orban tried to rally Central Europe behind Russia.

The question regarding Orban's motivations is vital because the EU needs to reverse this new policy as quickly and painlessly as possible or Russia will gain a significant strategic advantage. This is particularly important as NATO ramps up efforts to counter Russian aggression elsewhere across Europe.

The infiltration of Russian spies across Europe is no trivial matter. In Western democracies, personal freedoms make it harder to determine who is working for an adversary government. Once into the Schengen Area, movement is unchecked to 29 participating states.

Given the recent attacks on the French high-speed rail line before the 2024 Olympics in Paris, there is clear reason to worry.

The attack that shut down France's [high-speed rail](#) for almost a week was low-cost and required very little training on the part of the saboteurs. Simple arson and explosive attacks on the rail lines wreaked havoc on travel. The attack is suspected to have emanated from [far-left French extremists](#), but that does not preclude Russia from encouraging, training, and equipping domestic groups from undertaking such attacks. The Russians also use their special forces for covert attacks against civil targets.

Hungary's liberalization of immigration policy, favoring easy access for Russian and Belarusian citizens, is detrimental to the security of the European Union and NATO. At this early stage, Western leaders must ascertain whether it is possible to persuade Victor Orban away from openly supporting Russia in word and deed. This latest development gives Russia a strategic weapon that is useful in conducting warfare below the threshold of conventional war.

The Russians cannot be given greater operational freedom. It may become necessary to punish or alienate Hungary if it will not act in solidarity with other Western nations.

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