

Austria, Hungary: Choose your friends wisely!

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Russian intelligence agencies like the KGB, now rebranded as the FSB, the GRU and the SVR have, for some years, been quietly and discreetly infiltrating the EU. Countries like Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Baltics are all the subject of their attention.



Russian influence is now much stronger in Europe than people realise. For years, Russia has been placing key individuals into NATO countries, where they can quietly go about persuading political leaders and policy makers using propaganda, disinformation, and deception. While Brussels is conscious of Russian interference, it is doing all it can to keep NATO members of one mind. However, that's not always possible.

Notwithstanding Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine or the Israel-Hamas War, the impression gleaned by some is that Austria and Hungary are in some ways acting in concert. How can this be and where is the influence coming from?

Budapest is blocking the release of €50 billion in aid to Ukraine and the country's EU accession, while Vienna is using the impasse to push its own priorities behind the scenes and ignoring the urgency of Kyiv's situation. Austria's recent move on Ukraine is a familiar pattern of leveraging its neutrality to get closer to Moscow while claiming allegiance to the West, a tactic Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán has also mastered.

Austria's reputation for obstinacy in Brussels has been exacerbated by its year-long blockade of Bulgaria and Romania's path into the borderless Schengen zone. An Austria that goes against the pack, and often in cahoots with Hungary, is a frightening prospect for many in Brussels.

Austria has traditionally been a member of the Western European fold that will generally support the liberal consensus. However, Austria depends on Russia for gas and will prioritise its own needs over the collective West's. As Budapest continues to show tacit support for Moscow, Vienna appears to be slowly drifting closer to Russia and further from the Western agenda.

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