



Foreign Interference Risks and Institutional Responses Ahead of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections

Briefing Note

13 March 2026

Beginning on 5 March 2026, investigative reporting produced by journalists with a proven track record of uncovering confidential information and subsequent institutional discussions raised questions about possible Russian interference in Hungary's parliamentary elections scheduled for 12 April 2026.

While several elements of these reports, partially due to their nature and the lack of effective institutional responses, remain contested or unverified in the public domain as of now, the existence of warnings from Hungary's foreign partners and the known responses of Hungarian authorities raise legitimate questions regarding how potential electoral-integrity risks are being addressed.

Our note summarises what is publicly known, identifies areas of uncertainty, and highlights institutional responses relevant to the protection of electoral integrity.

Public reporting on Russian interference

On 5 March 2026, Hungarian investigative journalist Szabolcs Panyi (Vsquare, Direkt36) that European national security sources had warned of a potential Russian influence operation targeting Hungary's upcoming parliamentary elections.¹ The reports allege that the operation is overseen by Sergei Kiriyyenko, Vladimir Putin's First Deputy Chief of Staff who has been associated with Russia's political influence activities both domestically and internationally.² Sources cited in the reporting suggested that a team of three political operators linked to the GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency, could be operating from the Russian Embassy in Budapest under diplomatic or service cover.

On 11 March 2026, the Financial Times reported it had obtained documents according to which the Western-sanctioned, Kremlin-linked media consultancy Social Design Agency³ had devised a detailed

¹ Szabolcs Panyi. *Putin's election meddlers are coming to Hungary*. VSquare Goulash Newsletter, 5 March 2026, <https://vsquare.org/goulash-kremlins-vote-meddling-team-in-budapest-slovakias-shady-help-for-arms-group-ipo/>.

² For a portrait of Kiriyyenko, see Andrey Pertsev. *What to expect from the Kremlin's new overseer of post-Soviet states*. Carnegie Politika, a publication of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14 July 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/07/russia-post-soviet-politics>.

³ See the EU's Sanctions Tracker: <https://data.europa.eu/apps/eusanctionstracker/subjects/155817>, the USA OFAC's SDN list entry: <https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=45230>, and the UK's Sanctions List: <https://search-uk-sanctions-list.service.gov.uk/designations/RUS2292/Entity>.

plan to bolster support for Fidesz-KDNP.⁴ Commenting on this piece, journalist Szabolcs Panyi said, “I can now share a previously undisclosed detail regarding my own earlier information. I first learned about Kiriyenko's plan in the second half of February, when a foreign European national security source approached me with information that a large batch of documents had been leaked from Kiriyenko's team, detailing and proving Russian interference in the Hungarian election campaign and that the Russians were colluding with figures close to the Hungarian government. I do not know whether this package of documents reached the British newspaper, but I suspect it did.”⁵

Reactions of responsible authorities and institutions

Following the first reports, on 7 March, the question of possible foreign interference was raised during the session of the National Election Commission (NEC), the state authority responsible for ensuring the legality of the electoral process.⁶ A member of the NEC put forward a motion for the agenda that the NEC “contact the Constitutional Protection Office and the Parliament’s National Security Committee based on press reports regarding Russian secret service agents who have arrived in Hungary to influence the elections”. The Constitutional Protection Office is Hungary’s domestic security and counter-intelligence service responsible for detecting and countering foreign intelligence activities and covert efforts that threaten the country’s independence, constitutional order, or its political, economic, financial, and security interests.⁷ The Parliament’s National Security Committee is the parliamentary oversight body responsible for supervising the activities, legality, and accountability of Hungary’s national security services. The NEC, by a vote of 5 in favour and 5 against, with the president of the NEC casting his tie-breaking vote, rejected the motion to be put on its agenda.⁸ Thus the authority declined to engage institutions tasked with addressing the alleged Russian interference.

On 9 March 2026, the parliamentary National Security Committee reportedly discussed the issue of Russian interference at a closed session. Press reports citing a Committee member indicated that Hungarian intelligence services had indeed been warned by a foreign partner agency that Russian individuals would enter Hungary in order to interfere in the election. According to the same reports, Hungarian intelligence authorities stated that, after reviewing the information, the individuals named in the warning were not present in Hungary.⁹

Protection of confidential election-related information

The issue of election integrity also arises in relation to the exchange of sensitive information between international election observers and civil society organisations. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) participates in election observation missions alongside the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR). Civil society organisations, journalists, and political

⁴ Max Seddon and Marton Dunai. *Kremlin Backs Covert Campaign to Keep Viktor Orbán in Power*. Financial Times, 11 March 2026, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/34df20f9-487b-4cb6-9dc9-d676d959d1ed>.

⁵ Szabolcs Panyi’s post, 11 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/panyiszabolcs/posts/pfbid022EwE1u6gG8tmGcsEwt3MNV5SBg8qa98HjL7rVUcey7wAaG4ToKkx2GhpKxs4XQfBl>.

⁶ For more on the National Election Commission, see the HHC’s threat assessment of the 2026 elections, https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/12/2026_HU_Elections_Threat_Assessment_final_15122025.pdf, pp. 14-15.

⁷ Section 5 of Act CXXXV. of 1995 on national security services.

⁸ Minutes of the NEC’s 7 March 2026 session: [https://portal-api.valasztas.hu/files/69aecab0dff630002ea30d5/2026.03.07.NVB%C3%BCl%C3%A9sjegyz%C5%91k%C3%B6nyve\(1\).pdf](https://portal-api.valasztas.hu/files/69aecab0dff630002ea30d5/2026.03.07.NVB%C3%BCl%C3%A9sjegyz%C5%91k%C3%B6nyve(1).pdf), p. 2.

⁹ Telex. *It’s been acknowledged in the National Security Committee that warnings about the Russians were received, but according to the agencies, they are not in the country*, 9 March 2026 <https://telex.hu/belfold/2026/03/09/tenyleg-jelzett-egy-nyugati-titkosszolgalat-hogy-oroszok-ionnek-befolyasolni-a-valasztast>.

actors frequently provide confidential briefings to these missions regarding electoral conditions and potential risks.¹⁰

In this context, on 6 March 2026, in a letter addressed to the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee raised concerns regarding the participation of OSCE PA senior advisor Ms Daria Boyarskaya in preparatory election observation meetings. Ms Boyarskaya had previously worked for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and interpreted for Russian President Vladimir Putin.¹¹ The presence of someone previously affiliated with Russian state institutions and President Putin in discussions involving sensitive election-related information in the above-described Hungarian context create perceptions of confidentiality risks and discourage interlocutors from speaking openly with election observers.

The HHC requested that Putin's former interpreter be relieved of her duties related to the Hungarian elections to ensure an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality in these exchanges, which is essential for the effectiveness and credibility of election observation missions.¹²

Recommendations

Press reports and subsequent institutional discussions indicate that Hungarian authorities have been alerted to foreign interference risks ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections. While elements of the reported activities remain contested or unverified, the existence of such warnings raises legitimate questions about the adequacy and transparency of institutional responses aimed at safeguarding electoral integrity.

Ensuring that electoral authorities, national security institutions, and international observation mechanisms operate with transparency, diligence, and public confidence is essential for maintaining trust in democratic processes.

For these reasons, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee recommends

To the Hungarian authorities and institutions

- The **Constitutional Protection Office** should provide clear public information regarding the steps taken in response to the warning reportedly received from a foreign partner concerning potential foreign interference in the 2026 parliamentary elections;
- The **National Election Commission** should ensure that potential foreign interference risks affecting the electoral process are promptly and properly examined, including by seeking clarifications from relevant national security institutions when credible public reporting raises concerns regarding electoral integrity;
- The **Parliament's National Security Committee**, in exercising its oversight duties, should ensure that warnings received from foreign partners concerning potential election

¹⁰ See OSCE ODIHR's Needs Assessment Report of the 2026 Hungarian Parliamentary Elections, 21 January 2026, https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/01/HUN%20parliamentary%202026_NAM%20report_21.01.2026.pdf pp. 1, 16-17.

¹¹ See e.g., the comprehensive reporting on Ms Boyarskaya by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Revealed: Kremlin-Connected Russians Employed by Europe's Top Security Body*, 29 November 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/32693816.html>

¹² See Bloomberg, *Hungary Vote Monitors Rebuked for Former Putin Translator's Role*, 11 March 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-03-11/hungary-vote-monitors-rebuked-for-former-putin-translator-s-role?srnd=undefined>. See also Falter.at, *Daria Boyarskaya / Warnung vor Wladimir Putins Wiener Dolmetscherin*, 10 March 2026, <https://www.falter.at/zeitung/20260310/wladimir-putins-wiener-geheimwaffe>.

interference are thoroughly reviewed and appropriately addressed by the competent authorities.

To EU and NATO Member States

- Should consider offering technical assistance to Hungarian authorities aimed at detecting and mitigating foreign interference affecting democratic processes;
- Should continue to closely monitor developments related to foreign interference in the Hungarian electoral process, including the adequacy and timeliness of institutional responses aimed at protecting democratic processes;
- Where and when appropriate, should consider making reliable information on foreign interference in the Hungarian elections available.

To OSCE Institutions

- Should ensure that OSCE election observation missions operate under conditions that protect the confidentiality of domestic interlocutors and safeguard trust in the exchange of sensitive information.
