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Hungary: Ukrainian Syndrome

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A wave of street protests hit Hungary in 2015. Over 5 thousand people protested the policy of Prime Minister Victor Orbán on January 2. The government has taken steps to strengthen ties with Russia recently. The 2014 Hungarian parliamentary election took place on 6 April 2014. The result was a victory for Fidesz with Victor Orbán remaining Prime Minister. The party got 14% more votes to win the majority needed to amend the country's constitution. In October 2014 Hungary's governing Fidesz party won the lion's share of local elections, winning most mayoral slots including the coveted Budapest mayoral post as well as majorities on all county assemblies. Fidesz won 20 seats on the 33-seat Budapest assembly. No doubt, the government enjoys popular support.

On January 12, Gábor Vona, the leader of the Hungarian second largest political party Jobbik

(the Movement for a Better Hungary) shared his views on the ongoing events in an interview to Russian information agency Regnum. Jobbik is rapidly gaining strength. In particular, its popularity grows due to the reasoned criticism of the EU membership. The country joined the European Union 10 years ago. According to Mr. Vona, Hungary was dragged into the Union lured by the promises of higher living standards. «Communism fell and people wanted a quite life, jobs and freedom but got something quite different instead. They lost working places, 5% of population moved abroad looking for jobs. Mainly they were young people. Now Hungarians are split and frustrated. The manufacturing industry enterprises have either gone to the wall or moved into the hands of foreigners, only foreign-made products fill store shelves. Hungary faces the same situation Russia would if Yeltsin stood in power. It should be changed. It's not only a Hungarian headache, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe face the same problem.»

Gábor Vona explains that his party's foreign policy program envisions the revision of the relationship with the European Union, the withdrawal from NATO and the adoption of neutrality. He believes that the situation in the country is extremely worrisome. Unstable Ukraine is a neighboring country. It complicates the things. Mr. Vona points out that the US special services clearly have a hand in organizing the recent street protests. Normally such activities are coordinated by the US embassy. All the «dirty work» is done by US Chargé d'Affaires M. André Goodfriend who previously served as the Consul General at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, Syria. There is an impression that's something is cooking up in the country, perhaps, the Ukrainian Maidan-style events.

Agence France Press cites a 61-year-old manager who protests the Orban-led government's decision to put Hungary under the influence of Russia. He means the 10 billion euro credit granted by Russia to upgrade the Paks nuclear plant. A 53-year-old teacher opposes the return of centralized system of government her generation fought against.



Why the opposition is so much scared by Victor Orban? Eight years ago he was accused of being a Communist in disguise and a hidden supporter of János Kádár. Is he really the one? Far from it. There is nothing in his biography as a politician to confirm this view. At the time of Hungarian

perestroika (the period of reforms) he fiercely opposed Communism demanding free elections and the withdrawal of Soviet troops. He was Prime Minister when Hungary joined NATO. As the head of the government he supported market reforms in combination with strong social security policy. He believes that every Hungarian should have a job. If private business does not cope with creating enough working places, the government should step in. His social policy is in stark contrast with the irresponsible policies of Lithuanian, Romanian and Ukrainian governments ready to comply with any conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund even if real, not imagined, Holodomor strikes their respective countries.

It would be right to call Victor Orban a Hungarian nationalist. He is immune to ideological influence and concentrated on protecting the Hungary's national interests, be it economy, social security or foreign policy. In recent years he has come to conclusion that following the directives from Washington and Brussels does not result in improving the living standards of Hungarians, achieving energy security or increasing exports. For instance, the European Commission's directive on invasive alien species. Hungary is to limit their expansion what actually is the same thing as elimination to hurt Hungarian honey producers. But Brussels does not care. Orban often puts the European Commission into awkward situations by asking embarrassing questions. Based on common sense they put EU officials at a loss. For instance, Orban asks where the EU will get 25 billion euro from - the amount to be spent annually for an unknown number of years to bring the Ukraine's economy up to European standards. If nobody wants to shoulder the burden then why lure Ukraine into the EU association? Orban openly states that his country suffers from anti-Russian sanctions more than Russia does. He wants to know who will compensate the damage inflicted on Hungarian farmers? The Prime Minister says the idea of Russian gas supplies going around Ukraine meets the interests of his country. Mr. Orban adduces solid facts as he explains that Russia got the contract to upgrade the Paks nuclear plant because it won an open tender. Simply Russia came up with the best offer.



Western media says that Orban is prone to authoritarian rule, but, no matter that, democracy is very much alive in Hungary. It may not be a neo-liberal democracy, but that's the horse of another color. Democracy as the power of people does not have to be liberal; it depends of what people prefer, the national traditions, history, political culture and a lot of other things. In July 2014 Orban said illiberal or managed democracy is preferable for Hungary and singled out Russia, China, Turkey and Singapore as success stories. A number of politicians have come to power in their respective countries - Orban, Milos Zeman, the President of the Czech Republic, Robert Fico, the Prime Minister of Slovakia – to take their stands and refuse to take orders from Washington and Brussels. They undermine the «new Europe» concept offered by former US

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Not all East European countries continue to live in the memories of 1989-1990 velvet revolutions. Some former Socialist states are ready to cooperate and develop mutually advantageous relationship with Russia even if somebody in the West may not like it. Some West European leaders like Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi have started to speak out against anti-Russian sanctions; the unity of the West on anti-Russia policy is questioned.

Gábor Vona thinks that Washington will do its best to make Victor Orban change its course or topple him if the Prime Minister persists. The next trial of strength on the Budapest streets is expected on February 1 when German Chancellor Angela Merkel visits the country.