

NCSEJ Country Report



Hungary



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Since the end of the Cold War, Hungary has worked to establish stable political, economic, and legal foundations. Today, Hungary has a high-income economy and a very high Human Development Index score. <i>Read more.</i>	
History	3
The Magyars, semi-nomadic migrants from Eastern Europe, conquered the Pannonian Basin in the late 9th century and settled in what is today Hungary. In the 11th and 12th centuries, Hungary became a part of Western civilization and modeled its administration on that of the Byzantine Empire. <i>Read more.</i>	
Political Situation	5
Hungary is a parliamentary democracy with legislative, executive, and judicial branches, of which the unicameral Parliament (the National Assembly) holds the most power. <i>Read more.</i>	
Economic Situation	5
Despite a severe adjustment in the late 1990s, Hungary has managed to sustain a relatively healthy and growing economy. <i>Read more.</i>	
Foreign Policy	6
Hungary has mostly good relations with its neighbors. As a NATO and EU member, Hungary is focused on deepening integration and extending cooperation within the Western community. <i>Read more.</i>	
<u>Relations with the U.S.</u>	7
Hungary established diplomatic relations with the United States in 1921. The two countries halted diplomatic relations in 1941 when Hungary joined the Axis powers and declared war on the United States and reestablished them in 1945. <i>Read more.</i>	
<u>Relations with Israel</u>	8
Hungary recognized Israel and established diplomatic relations in 1948. <i>Read more.</i>	
Jewish History	9
Jews first settled in Hungary during the Roman Empire, before the Magyar tribes conquered the Carpathian Basin. <i>Read more.</i>	
Jewish Community	9
Currently, Hungarian Jews represent the largest Jewish community in East-Central Europe: estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000. <i>Read more.</i>	
Anti-Semitism	11
There is no official state discrimination against the Jewish community. Hungarian law punishes physical and verbal abuse of a person based on his or her religious affiliation with up to five years in prison and denying the Holocaust with up to three years in prison. <i>Read more.</i>	

Executive Summary

Since the end of the Cold War, Hungary has been successfully stabilizing its political, economic, and legal foundations. Today Hungary has a high-income economy and a very high Human Development Index score.

Hungary joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004. Although integrated into these Western organizations, Hungary has also pursued good relations with Russia. Hungary is a member of the Visegrad Group of Central European countries—along with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia—which advances cultural, economic, and security cooperation. -

A landlocked country in Central Europe, Hungary borders Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Ukraine, and Slovakia. The country has stable relations with all its neighbors.

Hungary maintains strong ties with the United States and has good relations with Israel.

Hungary's Jewish community is between 75,000 to 100,000 people and is mostly concentrated in Budapest. There is no state discrimination against the Jewish community, however, the existence of right-wing parties such as Jobbik has helped foster antisemitic rhetoric. Incidents of anti-Semitism include Holocaust distortion, negative depictions in the media, and the honoring of World War II-era leaders responsible for the deportation of Jews.

Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Hungary has seen almost 1 million border crossings. There are currently (July 2022) around 27,000 Ukrainian refugees registered for temporary protection in Hungary.

Hungary remains neutral in Russia's invasion of Ukraine and will not supply either side with weapons or military personnel. In July 2022, Hungary began allowing aid to Ukraine to be transferred through its borders.

History

The Magyars, semi-nomadic migrants from Eastern Europe, conquered the Pannonian Basin in the late 9th century and settled in what is today Hungary. In the 11th and 12th centuries, Hungary became a part of Western civilization and modeled its administration on that of the Byzantine Empire.

Statistics:

Population: 9,699,000
(2022 est.)

Size: 93,030 sq. km

Capital: Budapest

Major cities: Budapest,
Debrecen, Miskolc, Szeged,
Pécs

Jewish population: 75,000
– 100,000

Head of State: Katalin
Novak

Head of Government:
Viktor Orbán

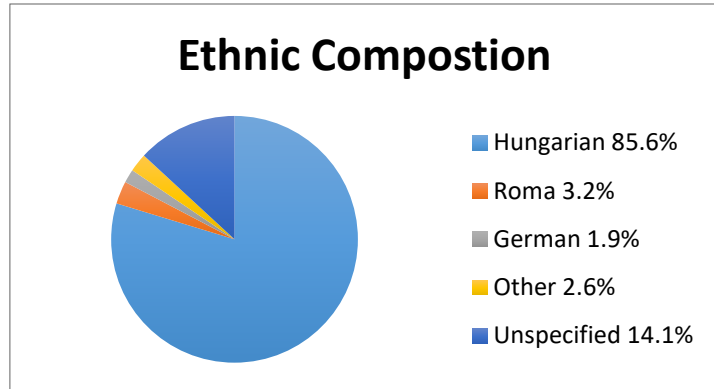
Foreign Minister: Péter
Szijjártó

**Ambassador to the United
States:** Szabolcs Takacs

**U.S. Ambassador to
Hungary:** David Pressman

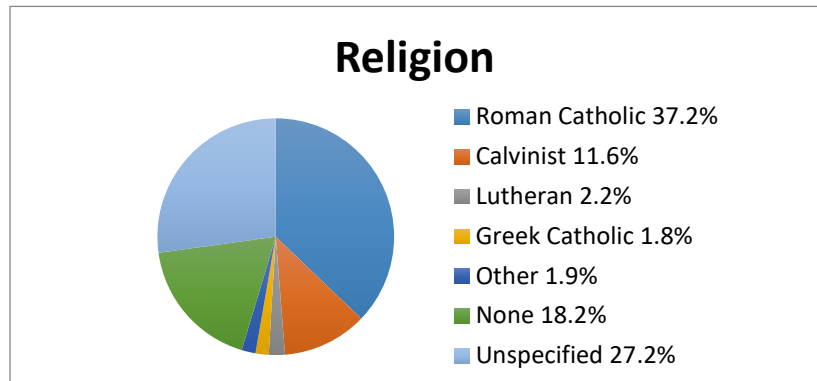
Freedom House Rating:
Partly Free

The Ottoman Empire occupied the greater part of Hungarian territory from 1541 to 1699. The Habsburgs (rulers of Austria), with the aid of other nations, expelled the Turks and, took over almost all of Hungary. Despite several attempts by Hungarians to establish self-rule (most notably, during the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848), the Habsburgs remained in power until 1918 when the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy was finally overturned.



(Percentages total over 100% as some respondents identify as part of multiple ethnic groups.)

During the First World War, Austria-Hungary fought on the side of the Central Powers. After the war, the newly independent Hungary was forced to sign the Treaty of Trianon, losing more than two-thirds of its territory and about 60% of its population.



In the Second World War, Hungary joined the Tripartite Pact along with Germany, Italy, and Japan and fought on the side of the Axis Powers. Until 1944, Admiral Miklos Horthy refused to obey Hitler’s directives on handing over Hungarian Jews; however, after the Nazi invasion in 1944, hundreds of thousands of Jews were deported to Auschwitz and other concentration camps. When the Hungarian Arrow Cross party came to power, thousands of Jews were murdered on the banks of the Danube River. Overall, some 565,000 Hungarian Jews were murdered during the Holocaust by the Nazis and Hungarian collaborators.

The Second World War helped Hungary regain some of the territories it had lost with the Treaty of Trianon. However, Communists started consolidating power in the country in 1947 and maintained a strong military presence there throughout the decades leading up to the Revolutions of 1989. All Soviet forces had been withdrawn from Hungary by June 1991.

Hungary experienced a relatively smooth transition from communism to a multi-party democracy and free market economy after 1989. In 1999, Hungary joined NATO and in 2004 it became a member state of the European Union.

Political Situation

Hungary is a parliamentary democracy with legislative, executive, and judicial branches, of which the unicameral Parliament (the National Assembly) holds the most power. Its 199 members are democratically elected to four-year terms. Along with legislative powers, the Parliament elects the head of state for five years terms. Since 2006, the Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Union) Party has been the ruling party in the National Assembly.

The President of the Republic is nominally the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and has the power to nominate the Prime Minister, to be confirmed by a majority of the votes in Parliament. The Prime Minister has the leading role in the executive branch and has the power to select and dismiss cabinet ministers.

President János Áder was elected President in May 2012. While in office, he was a strong advocate for the protection of human rights and acknowledged and apologized for Hungary's involvement in the Holocaust.

Viktor Orbán, a right-wing populist, has been Prime Minister since 2010. Orbán's first premiership was between 1998 and 2002, when he became the second-youngest Prime Minister of Hungary. Since 2010, Orbán has expressed views against liberal democracy, and targeted democratic institutions, including the free press and the judiciary. Government uses its influence over broadcasters and media companies to effectively deny opposition parties a voice, making elections less free and fair. Government regulations heavily impede the working of liberal non-governmental organizations. In September 2018, the European Union's legislature voted overwhelmingly to label Orbán's government a "systemic threat to the rule of law."

Orbán has regularly invoked anti-Semitic tropes to criticize Hungary's supposed enemies, particularly targeting billionaire philanthropist George Soros, a Hungarian émigré to the United States, and his Open Society Foundation.

In 2022, Katalin Novak assumed the office of the president. In doing so, she became Hungary's first female president and the youngest Hungarian president ever elected. Prior to her election as president, Novak attended the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism in 2021. She ardently spoke out against antisemitism in Hungary and Europe as a whole.

Economic Situation

Despite a severe adjustment in the late 1990s, Hungary has managed to sustain a relatively healthy and growing economy.

Hungary's economy is structurally, politically, and institutionally open. Since a market liberalization in the 1990s, Hungary has joined the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organization.

Since Hungary entered the EU in 2004, the government has made a number of reforms to achieve economic stability, but high unemployment, a low-skilled labor force, and hard currency indebtedness impede Hungary from entering the Eurozone, the government's biggest long-term economic aim.

Hungary is a post-industrial economy. The service sector employs a majority of the workforce, followed by the industrial and agricultural sectors. The unemployment rate has declined to below 5%.

Currency: \$1= 336.25
Hungarian Forint (2023)
GDP: \$181.85 billion (2021)
GDP per capita: \$18,728.1
(2021)
GDP Growth: 7.1% (2021)

Foreign Policy

Hungary has mostly good relations with its neighbors. The country has experienced complicated relations with Romania due to a historical territorial conflict over Transylvania, however, as full members of the EU and NATO, the two countries seek to work on further improving diplomatic relations.

As a member of NATO and the EU, Hungary is focused on deepening integration and extending cooperation with the Western community. The country has participated in NATO's operations in the Western Balkans, Afghanistan, and the Baltic region, and has been developing defense capabilities. Hungary has also contributed soldiers to UN peacekeeping operations in the Western Sahara, Cyprus, and Lebanon.

Hungary, under Viktor Orbán, has also been strengthening ties with Russia, increasing strategic cooperation in the fields of energy and trade. In 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Budapest to discuss bilateral ties.

As a member of the EU, Hungary supported Ukraine's territorial integrity during the Crimean crisis, however, Prime Minister Orbán emphasized Hungary's neutrality on the matter. Orbán has also opposed the EU sanctions placed on Russia as a result of the Kremlin's invasion of Eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea.

Hungary, along with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, is a member of the Visegrad Group of Central European countries.

Hungary is a host nation for NATO troops. Hungary is its own framework nation, but Croatia, Italy, Turkey, and the United States also contribute to the troop presence.

In March 2023, Hungary ratified Finland's membership to NATO. However, Hungary was more hesitant on allowing Sweden to join due to Sweden's past comments about the Hungarian state of democracy but has recently signaled support for Sweden's NATO induction. In July 2023, Orbán's cabinet met to settle a date for a parliamentary vote for Sweden's induction.

In June 2023, Hungary accepted 11 Ukrainian POWs from Russia without any prior notice to Ukraine. All Ukrainian efforts to contact these Prisoners of War have been denied by Hungary. Later that month, 3 of the 11 were returned to Kyiv.

Relations with the United States:

Hungary established diplomatic relations with the United States in 1921. The two countries halted diplomatic relations in 1941 when Hungary joined the Axis powers and declared war on the United States and reestablished them in 1945. Since the 1989 revolution in Hungary, the two countries have deepened diplomatic relations and increased their strategic partnership.

Areas of bilateral cooperation include NATO capabilities and multinational operations, counterterrorism, nuclear proliferation, missile defense, human rights, economic growth, energy security, and regional cooperation.

Hungary contributed soldiers to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Currently, roughly half of Hungarian troops deployed abroad are in Afghanistan. Hungary also takes part in the Kosovo Force (KFOR) peace operation, to which it contributes around 450 soldiers.

In 2014, Hungary signed the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) with the United States.

Since Hungary transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy, the United States has been a top foreign investor in sectors including telecommunication, IT, and automotive industries.

Hungary is one of the 40 eligible countries for the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP), where citizens of participating countries are eligible for a visa-free entry into the United States.

Among many areas of cooperation between the U.S. and Hungary is cultural cooperation. In April 2004, the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad and the Hungarian government signed an agreement to protect cultural properties in Hungary associated with American Heritage.

U.S.-Hungary relations cooled under President Barack Obama's administration, which grew increasingly concerned with corruption in Hungary and the Orbán government's enactment of anti-democratic measures, under its concept of "illiberal democracy." In contrast, Prime Minister Orbán and President Donald Trump have praised each other for their restrictive policies on border protection. The Trump administration has increasingly sought warmer relations with Hungary. Following Orbán's victory in the June 2018 parliamentary elections, Trump called to congratulate him. In 2023, Orbán has shown his support to Trump in response to his arrests.

In 2021, former Vice President Mike Pence praised Viktor Orbán's conservative policies at the Budapest Demographic Summit. The Summit gathered conservative leaders around the world and voiced right wing views on migration and the LGBTQ community.

In August 2021, then Fox News Anchor Tucker Carlson visited Hungary and commended Orbán for his anti-immigration policies.

Since his appointment in 2022, U.S. Ambassador David Pressman, a human rights attorney, has been attacked for his candor. In fact, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto accused Pressman of trying to interfere in Hungary's foreign affairs.

In July 2022, GOP leaders worked alongside Hungarian officials in an attempt to derail President Biden's global tax deal.

In April 2023, the United States sanctioned a Hungarian bank for its ties to the Russian government.

Relations with Israel:

Hungary recognized Israel and established diplomatic relations in 1948, severed relations in 1967 during the Six-Day War, and restored relations in 1989. Hungary has an embassy in Tel Aviv and four honorary consulates in the country. Israel has an embassy in Budapest and an honorary consulate in Szeged.

In March 2008, Hungarian President László Sólyom visited Israel and met with President Shimon Peres. President Sólyom also spoke at a plenary session of the Knesset, where he condemned attacks by Hamas against Israel. He also spoke about Jewish communal life in Hungary and expressed regret that anti-Semitic incidents are becoming more common in his country.

In July 2012, Hungarian President János Áder visited Israel and met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The two leaders discussed advancing bilateral relations, ways to advance negotiations with the Palestinians, and rising anti-Semitism in Europe. President Áder declared that he firmly opposed any manifestation of anti-Semitism.

In November 2015, Hungary opposed EU guidelines on labeling Israel settlement goods. During a visit to Jerusalem, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó called labeling "an insufficient instrument" that "does not contribute to a solution [to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict] but causes damage." Prime Minister Netanyahu praised Szijjártó for his "strong statement."

In 2018, Orbán visited Israel where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Hungary "a true friend of Israel." During his visit, Orbán spent time at Yad Vashem and the Western Wall.

Following the cancellation of the Visegrad Summit in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Orbán travelled to Israel anyways to meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu. While in Israel, Orbán signaled that his government planned to open a diplomatic office in Jerusalem, and in March 2019, Hungary opened a trade office with diplomatic status in Jerusalem. Hungary is one of only two European Union countries to have an official diplomatic presence in Jerusalem.



Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen with Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto

In January 2022, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett spoke with then-Prime Minister Orbán over the phone. The two agreed to enhance communication and cooperation in various fields. Then-Foreign Minister Yair Lapid helped coordinate the call even though he has stated in the past that Orbán espoused antisemitic rhetoric during his campaigns.

In May 2023, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen met with Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto to reaffirm strong bilateral ties and discuss Israel's judicial reform.

Jewish History

Jews first settled in Hungary during the Roman Empire before the Magyar tribes conquered the Carpathian Basin. Large numbers of Jews moved from Germany, Bohemia, and Moravia to Hungary in the 11th century, significantly enlarging the Jewish community.

The church's influence grew during the 14th century, when King Louis I of Hungary briefly expelled Jews from his realms. Intermittent discrimination against Jews in Hungary continued throughout the Middle Ages and into modernity.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Jews in Hungary were 5% of the population and 23% of the population of Budapest. From 1919-1921, in the wake of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's dissolution, Jews suffered under the "White Terror," an anti-Bolshevik movement that murdered approximately 3,000 Jews. In the early 1920s, anti-Semitic laws were introduced, and Jewish socioeconomic activity was restricted.

During the Second World War, over 560,000 Hungarian Jews were murdered by the Nazis and by the actively cooperating Hungarian government. In less than two months after the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, nearly 440,000 Jews were deported to concentration camps. Most Jews were sent to Auschwitz. By the end of July 1944, most of the Jews left in Hungary lived in Budapest.

The Hungarian Arrow Cross party carried out a reign of terror against the Jews left in Budapest. Hundreds of Jews were violently murdered; the rest were sent to a ghetto where they lived until Soviet troops liberated them in 1945.

The imposition of the Communist regime in Hungary resulted in the shutdown of a number of Jewish institutions and the arrest of Jewish activists. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, 10,000 Jews left the country. Since the fall of communism in 1989, all restrictions on Jews have been lifted.

Jewish Community

Currently, Hungarian Jews represent the largest Jewish community in East-Central Europe: estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000.

There are two separate Jewish umbrella groups in Hungary: the Federation of the Jewish Communities (MAZSIHISZ) and the United Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH). MAZSIHISZ organizes a variety of social welfare and communal service programs for children, youth, and veterans. The Federation also

maintains more than 1,500 Jewish cemeteries. EMIH is a smaller Chabad-allied group, with closer ties to the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

There are 23 functioning synagogues in Budapest and 30 more in other towns that are populated by Jews. Budapest also hosts a University of Jewish Studies, the only Jewish university in Eastern Europe, which includes a theological seminary. Budapest also hosts a plethora of Jewish kindergartens, primary schools, and high school. For example, the non-denominational Lauder Javne Community School has 600 students from kindergarten through high school.

There is also a functioning Jewish hospital, a Jewish community center, and nursing homes for Holocaust survivors in Budapest. The annual Jewish Summer Festival hosts 300,000 visitors each year.

There are kosher bakeries and restaurants in Budapest. A Jewish newspaper is printed twice monthly as well as a Jewish monthly magazine and a Jewish literary and arts journal.

Hungary established a National Holocaust Memorial Day in 2000. In 2004, the country inaugurated the Holocaust Centre in Budapest and a new permanent Hungarian exhibition at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation sponsor projects and programs focused on education, assistance to Hungary's poorest Jews, and revitalization of Jewish community life in Hungary.

Hungary became a fully-fledged International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) member country in 2002 and chaired the organization in 2006 and 2015.

In May 2013, Budapest hosted the Plenary Assembly of the World Jewish Congress. During the conference, Jewish leaders from around the world expressed solidarity with the local Jewish community against anti-Semitism, which has become more prevalent in recent years. In particular, leaders drew attention to the activities of the extreme right-wing Jobbik Party, which is represented in the Hungarian Parliament and espouses an unabashed anti-Semitic platform.

In February 2019, a 13th century synagogue in Budapest recently returned to the Jewish community celebrated its first Bar Mitzvah in 332 years. Later that month, scammers stole \$437,000 from a synagogue renovation project.

Tensions have developed between different factions in the community. Points of contention include resources, government recognition of official leadership, and the opening of a new Holocaust museum in Budapest, which some Hungarian Jewish groups are boycotting due to its equation of Nazism with communism. The local Chabad community has replaced MAZSIHISZ in partnering with the museum and government.

In January 2019, conflict again surfaced between Jewish community groups regarding an Israeli operation by the ZAKA emergency services to sweep the Danube River for the remains of those Jews murdered on its banks in Budapest during the Holocaust. MAZSIHISZ criticized the EMIH-initiated effort, which it said would violate halakha by disturbing Jewish remains. EMIH countered that there is a moral obligation to rebury a body found in a flooded grave. In ZAKA's initial sweep of the river, no remains were found.

In 2021, two new Jewish synagogues opened in Budapest as a culminating experience for the Jewish Cultural Festival.

As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Hungary's Jewish community has hosted many Ukrainian Jews. The main location has been Balaton Lake, an abandoned palace once at the center of political scandal. The palace can accommodate more than 600 people and has a kosher kitchen.

The internal conflicts in the Jewish community have been rising due to Chabad's take-over of an orthodox community. This alarms some progressive Jews as Chabad has a close relationship to the government. There are fears that this could set a precedent of governmental interference in Jewish life.

Anti-Semitism

There is no official state discrimination against the Jewish community. Hungarian law punishes physical and verbal abuse of a person based on his or her religious affiliation with up to five years in prison and denying the Holocaust with up to three years in prison.

Despite this, anti-Semitic rhetoric has become more common, even within the government. The popularity of the extreme right-wing Jobbik Party is especially alarming, as its inclusion in Hungary's parliament represents a tacit acceptance of extremism and emboldens right-wing activists to commit anti-Semitic acts. Even though Hungarian law automatically suspends the immunity of a parliament member (MP) for inciting hatred against religious communities, no MP has been the subject of such a proceeding.

Hungarian governments have pursued policies to rehabilitate the Horthy era, exonerate Hungary from its role in the Holocaust, and deviate attention from the Nazi genocide. At the same time, authorities have also promoted a positive narrative of Jewish life in the country during the pre-World War One period to defend against allegations of historic popular anti-Semitism. The Jewish community consistently expresses concern over the efforts to rehabilitate Second World War figures and anti-Semitic statements by the Jobbik party.

In recent years, anti-Semitic incidents in Hungary have included Holocaust denial, cemetery desecrations, physical and verbal attacks, and historical revisionism. Government leaders at both national and local levels have supported the rehabilitation of the reputation of historic figures that were known for their anti-Semitic views and support for Nazism. Prime Minister Orbán's government has been criticized for perceived ties to the Jobbik party and for covering up Hungary's involvement in the deportation of Jews during the Holocaust, despite vows of "zero tolerance" for anti-Semitism.

In November 2018, the Hungarian government pledged \$3,400,000 dollars to fight anti-Semitism in Europe. Prime Ministry spokesman Gergely Gulyas said that the funds would be used to establish an anti-Semitism hotline, as well as support education and justice initiatives. The decision was taken in response to criticism of the Orbán government for stoking anti-Semitism in the country through his attacks on George Soros.

In December 2018, a Hungarian business magazine closely linked to the Orbán government depicted the president of the Hungarian Jewish community surrounded by paper money. Orbán refused to condemn the magazine cover.

In February 2019, neo-Nazi marches took place in Budapest, which drew an estimated 2800 participants. The demonstration commemorated those Nazi and fascist forces who fought the Soviet Union in 1945.

In 2020, Maszihisz recorded 70 anti-Semitic incidents, with only one of them being violent.

In 2022, Hungarian Journalist Zsolt Bayer addressed the CPAC Conference. He has called Jews “stinking excrements,” has called Roma “animals,” and has made racist remarks towards black people. Bayer is a founding member of Fidesz.

In 2022, Maszihisz cited hate speech and conspiracy theories as the biggest issues facing Hungarian Jews. According to older surveys, 29 percent of Hungarians believe Jews control the media and 36 percent said there is a secret Jewish network influencing politics and the economy.

In the 2023 ADL report, Hungary received a 37% index score, meaning that nearly three million out of an eight million adult population held anti-Semitic views. Of those respondents, 58% believed that Jews have too much power in the business world and 55% believed that Jews have too much power in the financial markets.