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Hungarians Uphold NATO Membership

Despite Differing Views on Kosovo, Support for the Alliance is Stable

Within two weeks of its accession to NATO, Hungary found itself on the front line of the alliance's action against Serbia. While polls showed Hungarians were wary of being drawn into a wider military conflict, there is solid support for a NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo.

KEY FINDINGS

- Support for NATO membership and confidence in the alliance remain strong across the Hungarian public.
- Hungarians want NATO to leave open the possibility of further enlargement.
- While Hungarians support their country taking a role in international affairs, there is hesitation about taking a direct part in military actions.
- Most Hungarians do not fear being attacked by another country, but Serbia is seen as the most likely aggressor by those who do.
- Although divided (50% supported, 45% opposed) over NATO's airstrikes against Serbia, Hungarians maintain a positive outlook on NATO membership.

Hungarians Preserve Confidence in NATO

More than seven in ten Hungarians (73%) express confidence in NATO's ability to deal effectively with European problems (22% have little or no confidence). Confidence in NATO rose after the Madrid Summit, and has apparently not been dented by the NATO action in Kosovo (Table 1). Hungarians also express high levels of confidence in other European and international organizations (EU 73%, OSCE 56%, UN 68%).

Table 1: Confidence in NATO

	Confident	Not confident
1992	39%	24
1993	61%	23
1994	51%	21
1996	52%	32
1997	58%	28
1998	74%	22
1999	73%	22

Majority Back NATO Membership

Two-thirds of the Hungarian public favor Hungary's recently acquired NATO membership (37% "somewhat favor," 31% "strongly"). Just over a quarter (27%) are opposed. Support is slightly lower than last year (76%), but is still higher than in 1994-1997, when an average of 57 percent supported proposals to join NATO.

This report is based on data from face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults age 18 and older in Hungary conducted May 21-26, 1999. The firm Median in Budapest conducted the interviews for USIA.

While support for NATO membership is widely distributed across the population, supporters of Fidesz (81%) and the Free Democrats (SZDSZ, 72%) are particularly favorable. That said, supporters of the Smallholders (66%) and the Social Democratic Party (MSZP, 65%) also have majorities in favor of NATO membership. Younger people tend to be moderately more supportive, but there is no clear link to educational level.

Hungarians Prefer Arms' Length Involvement in Balkan Conflict

Hungarians express a willingness to participate in international affairs: more disagree (52%) than agree (45%) that "Hungary should not worry about world affairs, but just concentrate on taking care of problems at home." However, there is greater willingness to provide passive support for the alliance in lieu of becoming directly involved in any conflict. For example, although 50 percent voice approval of NATO's recent airstrikes on Serbia, eight in ten opposed Hungary's participation in the military action against Serbia (59% *strongly* opposed). While slightly more supported (51%) than opposed (44%) the government's decision to allow NATO unlimited access to Hungarian airspace, more than half (57%) opposed the potential stationing of NATO aircraft in Hungary for use in launching airstrikes (38% approved). Likewise, two in three (65%) *supported* sending NATO troops to Kosovo as peacekeepers, but six in ten (61%) *opposed* sending in troops "to stop the fighting between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs."

Hungarians Want Door to NATO Kept Open

Overall, the Hungarian public is more inclined to favor (65%) rather than oppose (26%) inviting other new members to join NATO within the next five years -- even taking into account the commitment to mutual defense. Views on further enlargement remain largely unchanged from last year (69% for, 20% against in 1998). Those who are more favorable toward further enlargement also tend to be more positive than its critics about NATO membership and the alliance's military action in Kosovo. While eight in ten think that it is *likely* that more countries will be invited to join (an increase from 73% in 1998), only a quarter (25%) currently think further enlargement is *very likely* (55% *somewhat likely*).

Security is a Concern, But Not an Overwhelming One

As in last year's survey, one in two Hungarians *disagrees* that "since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world has become much safer." However, Hungarians do not feel their country is under any particular threat of invasion. More than half are either "not very concerned" (29%) or "not concerned at all" (28%) that another country might attack Hungary sometime in the next few years. Four in ten are "somewhat" (29%) or "very concerned" (13%). Of those who do perceive a threat of attack, two-thirds (65%) say that Serbia would be the most likely perpetrator. Furthermore, those who most fear Hungary will be attacked tend to be less favorable toward Hungary's membership in NATO.

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Methodology

This report is based on data from face-to-face interviews conducted May 21-26, 1999 with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults (age 18 or older) in Hungary. The research firm Median in Budapest conducted the interviews for USIA.

Survey questions were prepared by the USIA Office of Research and Media Reaction. The questionnaire was translated by the contractor and reviewed by Office of Research and Media Reaction staff.

In theory, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about 4 percentage points in either direction from what would be found if it were possible to interview every adult in Hungary. Sampling error is larger for subgroups within the population of Hungary. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results.

For further information, please contact the analyst.
