



April 11, 2024

EXPERT INSIGHT | Center for Homeland Security & Immigration

AMERICA FIRST VISITS

HUNGARY

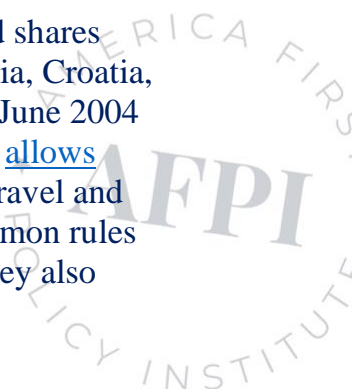
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TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ During a recent trip to Hungary, I represented the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) to gain firsthand insight into that country's effective border security policies.
- ★ There are strong natural synergies between this small Central European country and the AFPI because we each advocate for policies that put the interests of our respective citizens first.
- ★ Many of Hungary's border controls are similar to policies put in place during the Trump Administration or advocated for by AFPI to solve the current humanitarian and security crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border.

During the week of March 25, 2024, I traveled to Budapest to visit the Hungary-Serbia border, met with government officials to learn firsthand about their country's successful border security policies, and spoke at an event explaining the America First approach to border security in the United States. The trip was organized and led by the Center for Fundamental Rights—the think tank responsible for CPAC Hungary. The Center and the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) established a strategic policy partnership nearly two years ago because of our shared vision of advancing policies that put the best interests of our respective citizens first.

For those unfamiliar, Hungary is a landlocked country in Central Europe with a population of about 10 million people, roughly the population of Michigan. Geographically, it spans 93 square kilometers—about the size of Indiana—and shares borders with seven other countries: Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia. Hungary has been a member of the European Union (EU) since June 2004 and a member of the Schengen area since December 2007. The Schengen area [allows](#) people and businesses from most EU nations and four additional countries to travel and operate without border checks. Within the Schengen area, countries share common rules for crossing the EU's external borders, including the types of visas needed. They also



partner on cross-border law enforcement and have shared rules on short-stay visas (up to 90 days) and documents needed for traveling in Europe.

At any time, each Schengen member state has the [right](#) to temporarily reinstate its own internal border control in the event of a serious threat to public policy or internal security. This option was recently invoked by Germany, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, and Denmark to address high migratory pressure, including human smuggling.

Although the United States and Hungary are two vastly different-sized countries, the partnership between AFPI and the Center is a natural one because, on the issue of illegal immigration, both policy organizations recognize that without a secure border, a Nation loses its sovereignty. While the U.S. is currently facing a historic humanitarian and security crisis along our southern border because of the open border policies of the Biden Administration, Hungary has enjoyed nearly a decade of successful border security policies under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orban after confronting a border crisis of their own in 2015-2016. Unlike the self-inflicted border crisis in the U.S., the 2015-2016 Syrian migration crisis Hungary faced was not the result of their own failed policies but those of Germany and other Western European countries who espoused a far more permissive interpretation of “refugee” status than the applicable international law. Many of Hungary’s border policies have characteristics similar to those in the Trump Administration’s approach to border security and the America First policies advanced by AFPI’s Center for Homeland Security & Immigration.

Visit to Hungary-Serbia Border

The border of concern for Hungary in combating illegal immigration is its southern border with Serbia—a non-Schengen country. Nearly all of the unlawful border crossings during the 2015-2016 crisis occurred at the Hungary-Serbia border, driven by single adult males from Northern Africa. In response, Hungary established a three-pillar policy for border protection, consisting of physical protection, legal protection, and human resources. The physical protection is the construction of a multilayered barbed wire fence along the entire Hungary-Serbia border, as well as surveillance cameras and access roads. Hungary passed new laws declaring that migrants are not entitled to apply for asylum in the country and authorized the ability to return apprehended migrants to Serbia swiftly. The country also invested heavily in building out its version of the border patrol and established federal-local law enforcement partnerships to combat illegal immigration further.

During my trip to the Hungary-Serbia border, no activity of impending unlawful crossings was apparent, although a significant amount of trash, sleeping bags, and discarded phone cards were visible on the Serbian side—a visual similar to the Mexican side of the U.S. southern border. By contrast, when I was in El Paso, Texas, in May 2023,



as Title 42 was expiring, large groups of illegal aliens were camping in the streets, and other large groups were waiting at certain border wall gates for their turn to be processed into the U.S. under Biden Administration policies. I learned that Hungary experienced a 98 percent decline in unlawful crossings at the border sector shared with Serbia between January 2023 and March 2024. Interestingly, the Serbian government finally began increasing its own border enforcement efforts in October 2023, which has greatly contributed to the decline in unlawful migration.

Shared Obstacles in Securing the Border

While AFPI sees Biden Administration policies as the biggest obstacle to securing the U.S.-Mexico border, Hungary is forced to contend with the open borders philosophy of the EU. The general consensus in Brussels is that migrants have a “right” to global movement and to request asylum anywhere, regardless of the merits of the claim or the ability to seek humanitarian relief in a country closer to home. Hungary recognizes that it is a pass-through country, with most migrants wanting to reach Germany or other wealthy Western European nations, but it rightly objects to allowing illegal migrants to traverse their country. The decision to build a border wall at the Hungary-Serbia border was met with great opposition from the EU, and Hungary remains an outlier in its use of physical barriers to assist its border control policies.

Another common obstacle to border security is the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in facilitating illegal immigration. Throughout the world, these groups operate with a philosophy that claiming asylum is a “human right”—again, without regard to the legitimacy of the claim. These NGOs seemingly work directly with the smuggling and trafficking operations, providing resources to migrants, including cash and even guidelines for making asylum claims. While Budapest has outlawed NGO involvement directly with migrants under Hungarian law, these NGOs are emboldened under EU policy. Even though NGOs continue to impede Hungarian border enforcement efforts through engagement with Brussels, Budapest is currently better positioned to contend with NGOs because Hungary’s border policies allow for quick repatriations that minimize interference with their border security efforts. In the U.S., the current administration relies on NGOs to handle migrants after they have been processed and released from Border Patrol custody.

Conclusion

Over the course of my trip to Hungary, I learned that the illegal immigration/asylum fraud playbook is nearly identical across the globe. While Hungary is a much smaller country than the U.S., Hungary’s long-term application of its border security policies demonstrates that they do work to disrupt human trafficking and smuggling. The United States made significant progress in this regard during the Trump Administration, but all



of those gains were dismantled quickly upon the change in administration. Although the border fence along the Hungary-Serbia border is less robust than the wall at the U.S.-Mexico border, the significant reduction in unlawful crossings since Hungary's fence was built confirms that physical barriers work. AFPI and the Center for Fundamental Rights will jointly publish a paper later this year emphasizing in greater detail our shared border security policies and obstacles with a recognized philosophy that without borders, you do not have a nation.

