



EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

INSTITUTE OF POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND EUROPEAN
STUDIES

1/A PÁZMÁNY PÉTER SÉTÁNY, BUDAPEST 1117, HUNGARY
TELEPHONE: (1) 411 65 00

Description of the project

Honorable Members of the Committee,

my name is Péter Hevő, and I am an assistant professor at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Currently, one of my main research topics is the political debate on Hungary's NATO-accession and how the image of the Alliance has changed in the Hungarian public over the last 25 years. After the regime change in 1989–1990 and the withdrawal of Soviet troops, one of Hungary's main foreign policy objectives became Western integration. Accordingly, the country wanted to join NATO, and there was a consensus on this among almost all political parties in the 1990s. However, the Hungarian society was not so convinced of the necessity of joining the Alliance. Since a referendum on accession had been called, a major campaign was conducted to increase the transatlantic commitment. It is interesting to observe what were the most frequently voiced counterarguments (some of which focused on the US) and whether they have since been raised in political debates, particularly with regard to separating the country's NATO membership from US–Hungarian relations. Another important aspect of the research is the changing perception of the Alliance since 1999: How does the Hungarian society assess its economic aspects, decision-making, and military operations (especially the missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan)? In what direction has the discourse on NATO membership shifted under the Orbán governments? What can we expect in the future? I will present a part of this topic at the AHEA conference in Pécs in June 2025.

The reason I raise this issue is that although Hungary is widely believed to be one of NATO's least committed members, public opinion polls do not necessarily confirm this. Both society and defense policy professionals demonstrate a strong commitment to the Western alliance system. Hungarians like and trust NATO, and would still vote to remain a member. However, significant differences emerge based on party sympathies, particularly with regard to the benefits and obligations of membership.

Comparing my findings with NATO debates in other Central and Eastern European countries would take the research to a new level and enhance its international relevance. Some opinion polls show surprising results, with significant differences between countries in similar geopolitical positions. For this reason, I would like to extend the project to include the three other Visegrád Group members and, through comparative analysis, examine the historical, social and political factors that may influence perceptions of NATO. The topic requires a holistic approach in understanding the different levels of security, the application of IR theories (especially constructivism), and social psychology.

With the Várdy Legacy Scholarship, I would be able to conduct archival research in countries involved in the analysis and interviews with participants in the accession process. I would also have the opportunity to consult with colleagues in my field of interest and discuss possible future joint research projects. The scholarship would contribute to the writing of several studies that I plan to expand into a monograph later. This research could be of interest and relevance not only to Central Europeans, but also to Western NATO members who seek to understand the attitude of the Visegrád countries towards NATO.

In summary, the Scholarship would not only help my professional development, but would also contribute to existing knowledge by presenting a topic that has not yet been researched in the literature.

14 May 2025, Budapest

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Péter Hevő
assistant professor
Department for International Relations and European Studies
Institute of Political and International Studies
Eötvös Loránd University