

Assessing the June 2026 Minority-Rights Agreement Between Hungary and Ukraine

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**Hungary–Ukraine
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Introduction

The German Marshall Fund of the United States launched its Hungary–Ukraine Reconciliation Initiative in early 2026 to facilitate a structured dialogue between Hungarian and Ukrainian academics and policy experts to develop a vision for a degree of normalization in the relations between the two countries. The landslide victory of the Tisza party in the April 2026 parliamentary elections has since fundamentally changed the political situation in Hungary, which had previously undermined the relationship and affected the country’s relations within the EU and NATO.

In June 2026, Hungary and Ukraine reached a political agreement aimed at resolving the minority-rights dispute that has burdened their relations for almost a decade.¹ Following this, the EU and Ukraine were able to formally open the country’s first accession negotiation cluster. The agreement is potentially the most significant diplomatic shift in Hungarian-Ukrainian relations since the beginning of the dispute. Its practical value lies in the possible expansion of minority rights in education, language use, public communication, cultural life, political activity, and use of national symbols in Ukraine. Its strategic value lies in the fact that the negotiated guarantees have been linked to Ukraine’s EU accession obligations, through their incorporation into Ukraine’s minority-rights action plan that was required under the negotiating framework. What had long been framed as a bilateral dispute has become part of the EU’s enlargement conditionality.

This working paper first provides an overview of the substance and origins of the dispute between Hungary and Ukraine over minority rights, with particular attention to how education, language use, and cultural rights became linked to Ukraine’s EU accession negotiations. It then examines how the June 2026 agreement addresses the concerns raised by Hungary and by the ethnic Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia Oblast (Transcarpathia); identifies the elements of compromise and the issues that remain unresolved; and assesses its broader significance for Ukraine’s EU accession, Hungarian-Ukrainian cooperation, and minority-rights protection in general in Ukraine.

An important caveat at this stage is that the full text of the agreement and the diplomatic note have not been published. Ukrainian official communication has been limited, and much of the public record is based on statements by Hungary’s Prime Minister Péter Magyar, Ukrainian and Hungarian media reporting, and analysis by independent observers. This also raises the question of why the two sides have not published the agreement, even though its provisions, according to Magyar’s communication, have been incorporated into the minority-rights action plan. The official communication provides no explanation. A full consideration of why the text of the agreement was not made public is beyond the scope of this paper, but one possible interpretation is that this gives both governments greater flexibility in presenting it to their domestic audiences while limiting detailed public scrutiny of its provisions.

Background to the Dispute

The roots of the dispute lie in Ukraine’s attempt, following the start of Russia’s aggression against it in 2014, to strengthen the role of the Ukrainian language and to limit channels of

¹ Reuters, “[Hungary and Ukraine agree on minority rights, paving way for EU talks](#)“, June 3, 2026.

Russian influence in the country. From Kyiv's perspective, language policy was connected to state consolidation, resilience, and national security. Yet the instruments chosen affected not only Russian speakers but also other national minorities, including ethnic Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Bulgarians, and Greeks. The ethnic Hungarian community, historically concentrated in Zakarpattia, numbered approximately 150,000 in the 2001 census,² but it is now smaller partly due to migration and the effects of the war.

The key turning point was the 2017 Law on Education. Article 7 altered the previous framework for minority-language education by increasing the role of Ukrainian as the language of instruction after the early years of schooling.³ The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe warned that the reduction of opportunities for persons belonging to national minorities to be taught in their language could amount to disproportionate interference with existing rights.⁴ Similar concerns arose with the 2019 Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language,⁵ which strengthened the use of Ukrainian in public life. The Venice Commission judged that Ukraine had not struck a sufficiently fair balance between the legitimate aim of strengthening the state language and the obligation to protect minority linguistic rights.⁶

Until 2017, Hungary had strongly supported Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. After the education and language reforms, it argued that the government in Kyiv had removed previously acquired rights of the ethnic Hungarian minority. Hungary then used diplomatic instruments within the EU and NATO to slow or block Ukraine's integration until the contested rights were restored. This approach was often criticized as politicized obstruction, but Budapest maintained that minority rights were a legitimate accession concern.

In June 2022, following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, the European Commission recommended granting Ukraine candidate status.⁷ It identified reform steps required, including finalizing the legal framework for national minorities in line with Venice Commission recommendations and adopting effective implementation mechanisms.

In order to comply with the EU accession requirements, Ukraine adopted a new Law On National Minorities (Communities) in December 2022.⁸ Even though the Venice Commission noted positive elements in it, it emphasized that the law did not sufficiently address the education and state-language legislation that had generated earlier concerns.⁹ Ukraine

² State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, [All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001](#), [in Ukrainian].

³ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [The Law on Education adopted by the Verkhovna Rada on 5 September 2017](#), November 15, 2017.

⁴ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Opinion on the provisions of the Law on Education of 5 September 2017, which concern the use of the State Language and Minority and other Languages in Education, adopted by the Commission at its 113th Plenary Session \(Venice, 8-9 December 2017\)](#), December 11, 2017.

⁵ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language](#), November 18, 2019.

⁶ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Opinion on the Law on Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 121st Plenary Session \(Venice, 6-7 December 2019\)](#), December 9, 2019.

⁷ European Commission, [Commission Opinion on Ukraine's application for membership of the European Union](#), Brussels, June 17, 2022.

⁸ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Law of the Land "On national minorities \(communities\) of Ukraine](#), April 28, 2023.

⁹ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Opinion on the Law on national minorities \(communities\), adopted by the Venice Commission at its 135th Plenary Session \(Venice, 9-10 June 2023\)](#), June 12, 2023.

amended the minority law in September 2023,¹⁰ but the Venice Commission concluded that several of its recommendations had been implemented only partially or not at all.¹¹

A further amendment to the minority law was adopted in December 2023, modifying provisions on national minorities, education, media, local government, higher education, general secondary education, and the state language.¹² This established a differentiated legal regime for communities speaking official languages of the EU. For these minorities, it expanded linguistic, educational, and cultural rights, reversing most of the restrictions introduced after 2017. By contrast, the limitations affecting the use of Russian remained intact. The amendment therefore created a compromise formula that allowed Ukraine to respond to EU minority-rights concerns and accession-related requirements, while retaining a distinct regulatory approach toward Russian in light of the security considerations arising from the war.

The European Council decided in December 2023, to open accession negotiations with Ukraine. In early 2024, Hungary presented to Ukraine an 11-point list of demands concerning the ethnic Hungarian minority. The list was not published, but media reporting indicated that it included restoration of minority schools; guarantees for education in Hungarian; use of Hungarian in higher education, culture, media, public administration, and community life; and broader institutional protections. The June 2024 EU Negotiating Framework required Ukraine to adopt an action plan dedicated to the protection of persons belonging to national minorities, including measures on non-discrimination, hate speech, minority-language use and education, reporting mechanisms, and responsible institutions.¹³ Ukraine adopted such an action plan,¹⁴ but consultations with Hungary continued because the latter claimed that its demands had not been fully met. In 2024 and 2025, several rounds of negotiations took place, but the incentives for compromise had weakened on both sides by the second half of 2025. In Hungary, anti-Ukraine rhetoric became part of the governing Fidesz party's campaign for the 2026 parliamentary elections, while Ukraine had little reason to conclude a politically sensitive settlement with a government that increasingly framed it as an adversary. The formation after the elections of a new government led by Magyar created a political opening. This allowed negotiations to build on technical work that had already been conducted, which helps explain why an agreement could be announced within weeks.

¹⁰ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Law on Amendments to the Law “On National Minorities \(Communities\)” on Certain Issues of Exercising Rights and Freedoms of Persons Belonging to National Minorities \(Communities\)](#), September 26, 2023.

¹¹ Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Follow-up opinion to the opinion on the law on national minorities \(communities\) \(draft law #9610\), adopted by the Venice Commission at its 136th Plenary Session \(Venice, 6-7 October 2023\)](#), October 9, 2023.

¹² Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, [Law 10288 “On Amendments to certain Law of Ukraine concerning the consideration of the expert assessment of the Council of Europe and its bodies on the rights of National Minorities \(Communities\)” in specific spheres](#), January 22, 2024.

¹³ European Union, [General EU Position. Ministerial meeting opening the Intergovernmental Conference on the Accession of Ukraine to the European Union \(Luxembourg, 25 June 2024\)](#),

¹⁴ State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, [Action Plan dedicated to the protection of the rights of people belonging to national minorities \(communities\) of Ukraine](#).

The June 2026 Agreement

On June 3, Magyar stated that Hungary and Ukraine, after intensive expert-level consultations, had reached a comprehensive understanding on expanding the linguistic, educational, cultural, and political rights of the ethnic Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia. On June 12, he added that the arrangement had been formalized in a diplomatic note and that Ukraine had incorporated the agreed elements into its minority-rights action plan that is required as part of the EU accession process. Consequently, Hungary supported the opening of the first accession negotiation cluster, while Magyar maintained that it did not support fast-track accession and would make final accession subject to a legally binding referendum in Hungary. The EU and Ukraine have now begun negotiations on Cluster 1 on fundamentals.

Ukraine's official communication on the agreement has been limited. Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha welcomed the opportunity to open a new chapter in relations based on good neighborliness, mutual respect, and a shared European future, and he argued that Ukraine's EU accession would be the strongest guarantee for the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Zakarpattia.

Representatives of the Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Sub-Carpathia (KMKSZ), the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Ukraine (UMDSZ), and Hungarian church organizations participated in the consultations and have publicly welcomed the outcome.

The Substance of the Agreement

Because neither the full agreement nor the diplomatic note has been published, and Ukraine has said little, the substance of the deal can be reconstructed only from Magyar's statements. Based on this source and on public reporting, education is the central element of the agreement:

- Ukraine committed itself to restoring the system of national-minority schools (the current regulatory framework allows the operation of educational institutions offering minority-language classes, rather than a full institutional system of minority schools as such).
- The Hungarian language would be freely usable not only in the educational process but in all areas of school communication.
- Hungarian national symbols may be used freely in schools, including the singing of the Hungarian national anthem at school ceremonies, the display of the Hungarian national flag, and Hungarian-language signs inside schools.
- School administration may be conducted in Hungarian, and certificates may be issued in Hungarian.
- Ethnic Hungarian students would be able to take school-leaving and university entrance examinations in Hungarian.
- The range of compulsory subjects taught in Ukrainian could be expanded only with the prior consent of parents.
- Ukraine guaranteed the continued operation of minority schools even where student numbers are low.

The agreement also concerns symbols and public language use:

- In settlements where ethnic Hungarians make up more than 10% of the population, Hungarian national symbols may be used freely, minority-language rights may apply, and Hungarian may also be used in public communication and certain official or public-service administration contexts.
- In settlements where ethnic Hungarians make up more than 10% of the population, political activity may also be conducted in Hungarian—election campaigns materials, ballot papers, public notices, and informational materials may be available in Hungarian in qualifying settlements.
- Hungarian may be used in healthcare provision, at sporting events, and at scientific conferences.
- Members of the ethnic Hungarian minority would have the right to preserve national traditions and customs; celebrate national holidays and historical, cultural, and religious events in Hungarian; and establish national, cultural, and educational institutions.

The Compromises

The agreement appears to cover most of Hungary’s earlier demands. Because its official 11-point list has not been published, comparison must rely on media reporting, especially European Pravda’s detailed June 2024 account.¹⁵ Two issues appear to have required compromise: the abolition of the threshold of 10% of the local population for certain language rights and the demand for guaranteed parliamentary representation for the ethnic Hungarian minority.

There has been progress on the first issue. Hungary had reportedly argued earlier that minority-language rights should be linked to the historical presence of the ethnic Hungarian community in Zakarpattia rather than exclusively to demographic thresholds at the municipal level. If the enjoyment of several rights were to depend on a national minority having a set percentage within a defined territorial unit, Hungary’s concern was that this could be vulnerable to war-related migration and demographic change. At the same time, though, a 10% threshold is not high by regional standards. Slovakia applies a 15% threshold for minority-language use in municipalities. Serbia also uses a 15% threshold for official use of minority languages. Romania’s threshold for use in public administration is 20%.

The issue of parliamentary representation has been temporarily skirted. Hungary appears to have sought some form of guaranteed minority representation, but it remains unclear whether this referred only to ethnic Hungarians or to national minorities more broadly. According to Ukrainian media reporting, the two sides have set aside the question for now and may seek clarification from the Venice Commission and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on possible models.¹⁶

¹⁵ Sergiy Sydorenko, “Orban’s 11 demands: How Hungary crossed red lines again in blackmailing Ukraine on its path to the EU”, European Pravda, June 27, 2024.

¹⁶ Karina Levytska and Valeriia Pashko, “Budapest and Kyiv have agreed on most requirements for Ukraine’s EU accession; one issue remains”, Suspilne, June 8, 2026, [in Ukrainian].

This issue was always more difficult to turn into a binding accession requirement because the available international legal reference points are weaker. The Venice Commission's earlier opinions on Ukraine focused primarily on language, education, culture, media, public use, and participation in election campaigns, but it did not require guaranteed minority seats in the national parliament. Hungary could therefore rely on clearer legal grounding when pressing for education, language, and cultural guarantees than when demanding guaranteed parliamentary representation.

Here too, there are regional models to draw on. Croatia reserves eight seats in parliament for national minorities. Slovenia guarantees one seat each for its ethnic Italian and Hungarian communities. Romania provides preferential representation in the Chamber of Deputies, allowing one organization representing each national minority to obtain a seat under a reduced electoral threshold. Hungary itself allows recognized nationalities to field preferential minority lists in parliamentary elections and, where the preferential quota is not met, to be represented by nonvoting minority spokespersons.

Political Context and EU Significance

Technical negotiations had begun under Hungary's previous government, and media reports suggest that understandings had been reached at the expert level on most of its 11 points before the elections. The agreement became possible because the political incentives changed after the elections. Hungary's new government needed a visible achievement on this issue, while Ukraine needed to unlock the accession process without appearing to compromise on national cohesion.

Magyar's government had a political interest in demonstrating that it could protect ethnic Hungarians in neighboring states more effectively than the previous government by combining firm demands with a cooperative diplomatic tone. This protection is deeply embedded in the country's constitutional and political identity. The opposition would likely attack any government perceived as abandoning the representation of Hungarian interests in Zakarpattia. The Magyar government adopted a less confrontational approach toward Kyiv while maintaining the core Hungarian position that minority rights in Zakarpattia are a national priority.

For Ukraine, the agreement was necessary to unlock the accession process by addressing this bilateral conflict, clearing the way for opening negotiations on the first cluster. The fundamentals cluster is the backbone of the accession process because it covers the rule of law, democratic institutions, public administration reform, fundamental rights, and related issues. Under the revised enlargement methodology,¹⁷ it is opened first and closed last, with progress in it shaping the pace of the entire process. By incorporating the commitments in the agreement with Hungary in its minority-rights action plan, Ukraine could present the agreement not as a concession to its neighbor but as part of its EU integration.

However, Hungary is unlikely to regard the matter as settled. Because the agreed guarantees have been incorporated into Ukraine's minority-rights action plan, their implementation will be monitored throughout the accession process. If Ukraine fails to fulfill its commitments,

¹⁷ European Commission, [EU accession process step by step](#), October 2022.

Hungary—and potentially other member states—could raise objections and slow further progress.

The agreement can be seen as an instrument for rebuilding bilateral trust. This will be a difficult and long-term task because minority rights have become one of the most sensitive and emotionally charged issues in Hungarian-Ukrainian relations. A future high-level meeting between Magyar and President Volodymyr Zelensky could be an important symbolic step in this process.

The agreement's significance extends beyond bilateral relations. As its implementation has become part of Ukraine's EU accession conditionality, it will probably affect other minorities there, too. Kyiv is unlikely to codify guarantees only for ethnic Hungarians. The more plausible approach is to continue the approach introduced in the December 2023 amendments to the minority law: providing guarantees for communities speaking official EU languages, including Romanian, Hungarian, Polish, Bulgarian, and Greek, while maintaining a distinct approach toward Russian. It also means that Ukraine commitments will be reviewable and politically enforceable through the accession process.

One should be careful in estimating the broader implications of the agreement. On the one hand, enlargement policy remains strongly shaped by bargains between member states and candidate countries. The European Commission is responsible for assessing compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria for membership, including respect for and protection of minorities, but it does not have a sufficiently specialized in-house capacity for systematic minority-rights assessment. This creates space for political influence and encourages member states to seek legal guarantees through bilateral leverage rather than through a predictable technical process. The result can be that the evaluation of a candidate's progress on this part of the accession criteria may be more politically than technically grounded since there is no genuine expertise on minority rights in the European Commission, and thus less trust in the values-based character of enlargement policy. On the other hand, the case of Hungary and Ukraine also shows that political pressure, when combined with a favorable political moment and a concrete accession incentive, can produce valuable legal guarantees. The bilateral negotiation driven primarily by Hungary's concern for the Hungarian minority may ultimately benefit all national minorities in Ukraine that speak an official EU language. The lesson is therefore not that politics can be removed from minority-rights protection, but that it should be disciplined by clearer standards.

Remaining Challenges and Risks

The first risk comes from the absence of a public, finalized legal text. At present, all that is known about the agreement has come primarily through political announcements and media reporting. This makes it difficult to determine the exact legal scope of the commitments, the territorial application of language rights, and the enforceability of deadlines. If Ukraine's parliament adopts amendments that Hungary considers incomplete, the dispute could quickly flare up.

The second risk regards legislative implementation. Ukraine must translate the political settlement into amendments to several laws, including ones addressing minorities, education, local government, elections, public administration, media, and possibly healthcare.

Implementation must define who has the right to use a minority language, in which institutions, before which authorities, and at what territorial level, etc. Minority schools also need operational clarity regarding staffing, curricula, examination procedures, administrative documentation, and financing.

The third risk is Ukrainian domestic resistance. The agreement touches sensitive issues of language, identity, and sovereignty during wartime. Some Ukrainian social-media reactions have accused the government of making excessive concessions and yielding to Hungarian pressure. These reactions matter because implementation will require parliamentary action and administrative cooperation.

The fourth risk regards monitoring. Incorporating the agreement into Ukraine's minority-rights action plan is valuable because it creates an EU accession benchmark. However, the EU's tools are not sufficient on their own. The European Commission can track adoption of legislation and general implementation, but it has limited in-house expertise on minority-language education, local language use, and the practical operation of minority rights. Hungary will monitor implementation closely, but a purely Hungarian assessment would lack broader legitimacy, especially because the new rules may affect other minorities speaking EU official languages.

The fifth risk is that the unresolved issue of parliamentary representation comes to the fore again at a politically inconvenient moment. If the two governments have merely postponed addressing it, it may reappear during the fundamentals cluster negotiations. A carefully designed consultative or electoral mechanism could strengthen minority participation, but it may trigger resistance if framed a provision for a specific minority imposed from outside.

The final risk concerns excessive expectations. The agreement cannot by itself repair a decade of mistrust or remove all tensions between Ukraine's legitimate interest in strengthening its state language and the interest of minority communities in using their mother-tongue in education and public settings. It can succeed only if treated as an implementation process rather than a symbolic settlement.

Recommendations

First, Ukraine should rapidly codify the agreed guarantees in legislation. The government should publish a clear legislative roadmap identifying which laws will be amended, responsible ministries, deadlines, and consultation arrangements. If media reports are accurate about amendments to the minority law being expected by the end of this year and further changes connected to political participation, public life, and local-government legislation in 2027, these deadlines should be included in an implementation calendar and linked to accession reporting. Ukraine should avoid vague umbrella clauses and instead adopt operational provisions that schools, municipalities, hospitals, election bodies, and citizens can apply directly.

Second, Hungary and Ukraine should establish a permanent bilateral minority-rights consultation mechanism. This body should include both governments, representatives of ethnic Hungarians in Zakarpattia, church and education actors, and independent legal experts. Its purpose should not be to internationalize every local dispute but to create a predictable channel for early warning, technical clarification, and trust-building.

Third, the two governments should expand practical cooperation in education, culture, and cross-border community development. Legal rights need institutional and financial support. Teacher training, bilingual educational materials, school exchanges, university partnerships, cultural programming, local development projects, and cross-border infrastructure can help shift the debate from zero-sum identity politics toward shared regional development. Such efforts should not be limited to the ethnic Hungarian community in Ukraine but extended to all minority communities speaking official EU languages.

Fourth, the EU should monitor implementation through the accession process, but it should strengthen how it does so. The European Commission and EU Council should treat Ukraine's minority-rights action plan as a living benchmark under the fundamentals cluster and assess not only the adoption of laws but also how these are applied and implemented by the Ukrainian authorities. Monitoring should draw systematically on the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention and Language Charter expertise, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, academic specialists, civil society, and representatives of minority communities.

Fifth, the issue of parliamentary representation should be handled cautiously and comparatively. Hungary and Ukraine should request Venice Commission and OSCE guidance, but they should not reduce political participation to a single model. Other countries in the region show there are many options: reserved seats, preferential thresholds, minority electoral registers, consultative councils, local and regional minority bodies, and enhanced participation in administrative decision-making.

Sixth, both governments should invest in political communication. Hungary's should avoid presenting implementation of the agreement as a unilateral victory, while Ukraine's should avoid presenting minority guarantees as reluctant concessions extracted under pressure. Both should consciously frame the agreement as part of Ukraine's EU integration process rather than as a bilateral bargain. By incorporating the agreed guarantees into Ukraine's minority-rights action plan, these have effectively become an EU benchmark. Treating them as such could reduce politicization of the issue in both countries. For Hungary, it demonstrates that EU conditionality can also advance priorities important to itself. For Ukraine, implementation can be presented as compliance with EU values and rule-of-law standards rather than as a unilateral concession to Hungarian pressure. This approach is consistent with the European Parliament's May 2026 resolution that emphasized that the protection of minorities is an integral part of the EU's rule-of-law framework.¹⁸

¹⁸ European Parliament, [European Parliament resolution of 20 May 2026 on the rule of law, fundamental rights and misuse of EU funds in Slovakia: the need for an EU response \(2026/2607\(RSP\)\)](#).

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About the Hungary–Ukraine Reconciliation Initiative

The Hungary–Ukraine Reconciliation Initiative of the German Marshall Fund of the United States addresses challenges related to trust, security, EU integration, and minority rights in the relations between these two neighboring countries. It offers a strategic confidence-building approach to developing a constructive agenda for the relationship between Hungary and Ukraine.

The initiative aims to serve as a policy compass for democratic governments in Kyiv and Budapest, to foster mutual understanding among experts and stakeholders with positive spillover effects for both societies, and to help remove obstacles on the Hungarian side that may hinder Ukraine's EU accession process.

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