

Hungarian government mounts new assault on LGBT rights

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Constitutional amendment proposed to enshrine defence of so-called ‘Christian values’

Moments before [Hungary](#) entered a second coronavirus lockdown on Wednesday, the far-right government signalled its intention to pass a range of new legislation, including to make it harder for opposition political parties to join forces and to change the constitution to enshrine the defence of so-called “Christian values”.

Opposition politicians criticised both the substance and timing of the moves.

The proposed constitutional amendment, submitted to parliament by the justice minister, Judit Varga, late on Tuesday, is the latest assault on LGBT rights in the country, where [legal recognition for gender changes was ended](#) in May.

“Hungary protects children’s right to identify as the sex they were born with, and ensures their upbringing based on our national self-identification and Christian culture,” the amendment states. The constitution already stipulates that marriage must be between a man and a woman, but the amendment says that in a parent-child relationship “the mother is a woman and the father is a man”.

The amendment would ensure that only heterosexual married couples can adopt children. Single people could gain exemptions by special ministerial permission.

The attempted justification for the amendment explains that “new, modern ideologies in the western world raise doubt about the creation of the male and female sex, and endanger the right of children to have healthy development.” The Hungarian language has the same word for sex and gender.

For years, Viktor Orbán’s government has relied on an anti-migration agenda to rally its base, and some analysts suggest LGBT people may be the new target. In Poland, the ruling populist Law and Justice (PiS) party has made the fight against so-called “LGBT ideology” central to its political messaging.

Orbán’s government is facing pressure arising from discussions in the EU to link the disbursement of some European funds to rule of law criteria, as well as pressure over rising coronavirus cases. The new lockdown includes an 8pm curfew and the closure of restaurants and bars. Parliament has voted for a 90-day “state of emergency” during which the government can issue decrees on virus-related matters without parliamentary approval.

The timing of the new legislative initiatives, which were announced with no warning, was reminiscent of an earlier barrage of legislation unrelated to coronavirus that was introduced during the [first coronavirus “state of emergency”](#) in the spring.

The independent MP Bernadett Szél wrote on Facebook that “instead of fighting the virus, they wish

to fight the LGBT community”. Katalin Cseh, an MEP of the opposition Momentum party, [wrote](#) on Twitter: “Parents, schools, hospitals, small businesses are hours away from a lockdown – not knowing what will happen, as details of regulations haven’t even been published yet. On the govt’s agenda: a constitutional amendment to fight gender ideology.”

The new laws will have to be debated in parliament, but Orbán’s Fidesz party has a two-thirds majority, sufficient to make constitutional amendments.

While the gender-related initiatives are the most eye-catching, the political changes could also prove significant. The new rules would make it harder for parties to run joint lists in elections without fully uniting.

Fidesz has dominated Hungarian politics over the past decade, but the fragmented opposition has had success in mayoral elections – [including in Budapest](#) – when unifying behind a single candidate. Opposition parties had announced their intention to run unity candidates against Fidesz in parliamentary elections in 2022.

“Viktor Orbán has become unworthy of his office once and for all,” six opposition parties said in a statement on Wednesday, Reuters reported. “This only goes to show that he no longer feels safe even in the election system he wrote for himself, which is fitting because he will lose.”

Shaun Walker

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