
HUNGARY'S ORBAN OFFERS MONTENEGRO HELP IN 'DEFENDING' ITS BORDERS

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Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban offered on Tuesday to help Montenegro "defend" its borders from a rising number of migrants and refugees, but his Montenegrin counterpart said there was no need yet for a Hungarian-style fence.

Making his first official visit to the tiny Adriatic country, Orban reiterated that the Balkan route for migrants and refugees trying to reach the European Union should remain closed.

Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia have each seen an increase in numbers heading north to EU member Croatia since the beginning of 2018 – a total of 6,700 from January until the end of May, more than twice the number registered in these three countries for the whole of 2017.

Local media reports suggest the vast majority come from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Palestine and Iraq.

After talks with Montenegrin Prime Minister Dusko Markovic, Orban said "Europe is still making serious mistakes."

"I told Prime Minister Markovic that if they have issues with migrants, Hungary is willing to help, because when Montenegro defends its borders, it does not only defend Montenegro but Hungary and the entire EU as well," Orban was quoted as saying in a press release from the Montenegrin government.

The EU needs Montenegro too," Orban told a press conference, and appeared to link EU enlargement plans – according to which Montenegro could join the union by 2025 – and the issue of illegal migration.

It does not matter if countries have good economic and political perspectives if they are unable to protect their territory and cultural identity, he said.

"You very well know the Hungarians' attitude; our position is the protection of the identity and territorial integrity of Hungary."

Relations between the EU and Hungary have been strained by the strict anti-migration and anti-refugee positions of Orban's government. In 2015, Hungary built two rows of razor-wire fence on its southern border with Serbia after hundreds of thousands of migrants passed through.

In May, it offered to donate a fence to Montenegro but Podgorica said it was not necessary, "so far".

Markovic thanked Orban for the gesture, but said: "For now, there are no reasons for that."

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