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## **ORBAN HOSTS WEBER IN BUDAPEST FOR EPP SHOWDOWN**

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Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orban is set to host the leader of the European Parliament's centre-right political group in Budapest on Tuesday (12 March).

The meeting with group chair Manfred Weber follows weeks of speculation on the future of Orban's Fidesz nationalist party within the centre-right EPP.

Some dozen Fidesz MEPs belong to the EPP, the European Parliament's largest political group.

But Orban's anti-migration campaign and nation-wide poster ad attacks against philanthropist George Soros and European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker have upped the pressure on Weber to boot out Fidesz from the political group ahead of the European elections in May.

The political rift appears to have only widened after Weber's demand last week for an apology from Orban over the anti-EU rhetoric remains unanswered.

Hungary's problems run deep amid a backsliding of political rights, the lowest since 1989, and a European Parliament that last September demanded Budapest be censured over the "clear risk" of breaching EU values.

The commission last month launched a counter-attack against Orban's anti-migration campaign, which the chief commission spokesman described as "ludicrous conspiracy theory".

Weber's apparent reluctance to move against Orban has also cast a shadow over his campaign to become the next European commission president.

Earlier this month, Weber said Orban must reverse his decision to expel the Central European University (CEU) from Budapest in order to remain in the EPP.

He also told German newspaper Welt am Sonntag over the weekend that Orban wants to remain in the EPP.

"He knows that in order to do so, he has to show that he accepts our common values and show solidarity with us in the campaign," he said.

Tuesday's encounter is billed as a last-ditch effort for reconciliation between the two sides ahead

of 20 March meeting where a final decision is set to be made on the future relationship.

But in a radio interview last week, Orban appeared defiant, saying there will be no compromise from Hungary against migration and on "the protection of Christian culture".

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Kaynak/Source: