

PHOTO OF THE DAY

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Vivien Cher Benko



PM Viktor Orbán addresses the annual meeting of Hungarian ambassadors

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office reports on Jan industrial output, retail sales, foreign trade figures

Events related to the wars in Middle East, Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: COMMON SENSE IN WORLD ECONOMY KEY

It is crucial to restore "common sense and normality" to the approach to the global economy in order to avoid a long-term slowdown, the minister of foreign affairs and trade has said, adding that the OECD could play a key role in this.

"We want to avoid a long-term global economic slowdown," Péter Szijjártó told a joint press conference with OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann, according to a ministry statement. "We believe that this requires restoring common sense and normal thinking to the global economy". "This common sense and normal way of thinking is in no way compatible with initiatives aimed at isolating the Eastern and Western economies," he said. "It is incompatible with turning the cause of the green transition into a kind of political and ideological monopoly, with treating energy cooperation as an ideological issue rather than a practical one, and with pro-war political strategies," he added. Instead, Szijjártó said, everything must be done in the interest of restoring cooperation based on mutual respect between East and West. He said this cooperation assumed a world trade based on fair competition. This, he added, should not restrict tax competition and should include responsible growth strategies in which environmental protection and the improvement of competitiveness went hand in hand.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY 'LIVING EXAMPLE' OF COMMON SENSE LEADING TO SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Hungary is "a living example" of how common sense allows for the implementation of a successful economic strategy that has allowed the country to maintain economic growth, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, told a joint press conference with OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann on Tuesday. Szijjártó said it was such a strategy that had made Hungary a "meeting point" for investments from the East and West where "every economic player has a chance for free and peaceful cooperation". He said restoring common sense to thinking about the global economy required international organisations that promoted this way of thinking, adding that the OECD was such an organisation. He said cooperation with the OECD had helped Hungary with enacting common-sense economic strategy decisions in recent years. "It is the OECD that represents common sense and normality in the international economy today," the minister said, adding that the organisation could be key in preventing the re-emergence of geopolitical blocs and maintaining connectivity in the coming years. Hungary therefore supports the OECD's efforts, its enlargement, increasing its budget, as well as the

secretary-general's efforts in making the OECD "an even more successful international organisation", he said.

ORBÁN HOLDS TALKS WITH OECD SECRETARY- GENERAL

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann on Tuesday, Orbán's press chief said. Orbán expressed appreciation of the work of the organisation and the secretary-general, and said the OECD was among the international platforms that applied a pragmatic approach based on common sense, Bertalan Havasi said. In recent years, the OECD has been a valuable partner for Hungary in its preparations for consultation talks with the European Commission concerning EU funds. "We greatly appreciated the objective and professional opinion of the OECD concerning the reform of the public procurement system, the sustainability of the pension system and the anti-corruption strategy," he said. Orbán and Cormann expressed concern about trends promoting the formation of blocs in the world economy and about the strengthening of voices calling for decoupling and isolation.

ORBÁN ADDRESSES AMBASSADORS' MEETING

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán addressed the annual meeting of Hungarian ambassadors on Tuesday, and said

that the new, emerging world order required constant assessment and analysis. The prime minister said Western hegemony had ended. "They want to divide the world economy into geopolitical blocs, and put enormous pressure on sovereigntist countries such as Hungary," Orbán said. Orbán said Hungary had an interest in remaining a member of the European Union and NATO "but not in the creation of blocs". "That is why we will strengthen our alliance with other sovereigntist countries". "Rather than explaining ourselves for our political differences, Hungary's ambassadors are tasked with representing Hungary's success with undisputable economic facts," Orbán said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: UKRAINE'S RESPONSE TO HUNGARY REQUESTS 'NO STEP TOWARDS RESTORING MINORITY'S 2015 RIGHTS'

Ukraine's response to Hungary's 11-point document on minority rights is not bringing closer the restoration of the Hungarian community's rights to 2015 levels, the foreign minister said on Tuesday. Speaking at a press conference held together with Mathias Cormann, the Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Péter Szijjártó said in response to a question that he had made Hungary's requests clear at his meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in January. "We asked for no

special treatment, only to restore the acquired rights of [ethnic] Hungarians," he said.

He lamented that Ukraine's response to the document "contains no progress in that regard". Hungary will respond to the document on Wednesday, he said. "Until Ukraine adopts legislation to restore the rights of Hungarian national minorities, Hungary sees no point in a highest-level meeting," he said.

Asked about French President Emmanuel Macron's statement that sending land troops to Ukraine "cannot be excluded", Szijjártó said it went against NATO's unanimous decision that direct confrontation with Russia should be avoided at all cost. "In the past two years, amending this decision ... has not been tabled in any NATO meetings." Hungary will stick to the relevant NATO decision, he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: LIMITING CONTACTS TO THOSE THAT SHARE CONSENSUAL POSITIONS 'NO DIPLOMATIC ACHIEVEMENT'

It is no achievement in diplomacy to limit contacts to those that share consensual positions in everything, the foreign minister said on Tuesday. The ministry cited Péter Szijjártó telling a press conference that what he considered a real achievement in diplomacy was to maintain contacts with those that have a different opinion in certain matters. At a press conference held after meeting OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann

in Budapest, Szijjártó was asked to comment on criticism by Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk about him having dinner with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov at last week's Antalya Diplomatic Forum. He said relations between Hungarians and Poles went beyond friendship and the brotherhood they shared "can tolerate the political episodes that the prime minister of Poland has produced in the past few weeks". "One must simply respect that we have different views about the possibility of peace in Ukraine," he said. "We are a pro-peace government, while the government of Poland holds more of a pro-war position," he added.

He also said that the Antalya forum was "almost like a United Nations general assembly session" and he sat at the same dinner table with the foreign ministers of six or seven countries, including Russia. "And if one sits next to a foreign minister colleague, then they usually have a conversation," he said. "It is among our duties as foreign ministers to maintain contact with each other."

Szijjártó said that if he again gets the opportunity and needs to do so, he will again hold talks with his Russian counterpart. "The Polish prime minister would be surprised to know the long list of European politicians who have asked me in recent years to help them establish contacts with the Russians, to organise a meeting or to pass on a message," he said. "What's more, occasionally even the representatives of opposing sides have asked such a

favour and if I again receive that type of request, I will be certainly happy to help," he said. Commenting on reports about the potential election of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte as NATO secretary-general, he said the Hungarian government would not be able to support the appointment of a person "who wanted to bring Hungary to its knees in the past". "It would be very strange if the Hungarian government supported the nomination of such a person," he added.

PRESIDENT SIGNS RATIFICATION OF SWEDEN'S NATO ACCESSION

Hungary's new president Tamás Sulyok signed parliament's ratification of Sweden's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on Tuesday, according to the Sándor Palace's website. The signing of the ratification is Sulyok's first act as head of state, the website said.

KTK: GOVT ESTABLISHES SECURITY ADVISORY BODY

A new permanent body, the Strategic Advisory Council, has been set up to aid the work of the prime minister and the government in strengthening Hungary's security and improving the living conditions of the Hungarian people, the Government Information Centre (KTK) said in a statement on Monday. Headed by Balázs Orbán, the prime minister's political director,

the council will be tasked from March 14 with making proposals to the government focused on optimising resilience to risks related to sovereignty and security, as well as social, economic, cultural and other risks, the statement said.

A secretariat set up within the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office and overseen by the political director will be in charge of tasks related to the advisory council's operations, it added. Members of the council are György Bakondi, the prime minister's chief national security advisor, Árpád Kovács, head of the State Audit Office, József Kovács, state secretary for national information, Miklós Maróth, science policy advisor to the prime minister, Károly Papp, state secretary in charge of the civilian national security services, and István Stumpf, a political scientist and constitutional lawyer.

JUSTICE MINISTER: HUNGARY REJECTS ATTEMPTS TO BAN PUNISHMENT OF ORGS HELPING MIGRANTS

Hungary rejects all attempts in the European Union to ban the punishment of organisations aiding illegal migration "citing humanitarian reasons", the justice minister said in Brussels on Tuesday. Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting of EU justice ministers, Bence Tuzson said organisations aiding illegal migration were engaging in "people smuggling". Tuzson noted that in 2018, Hungary

adopted the "Stop Soros" package of laws that included legislation which criminalises sharing information with illegal migrants. "Hungary doesn't want to change this," he added. "We will not adopt the proposal banning liability, because we don't want organisations aiding illegal migration to be able to continue their activities without repercussions," he said. The minister cited an EU regulation allowing member states the decision not to punish organisations providing humanitarian assistance. But for the first time in the bloc's history, there is a proposal that would mandate member states to scrap the measures in their criminal law that concerned "civil groups that organise and aid illegal migration", he added.

Detailing the proposal, Tuzson said it called for limiting criminal liability to those who can be proven to be aiding illegal migration in exchange for money. He said that under the proposal, those who aid migrants in exchange for "proportionate financial compensation" could not be punished, either, adding that the proposal failed to clarify what "proportionate financial compensation" meant. Tuzson said that though certain member states had expressed "shock" at the proposal at Tuesday's meeting, Hungary was the country that recommended rejecting the package in its entirety, sticking consistently to its earlier position. He said this plan had been "another in a series of plans that the European Commission rushed before member states without consultation or an impact study".

SURVEY: 51% OF HUNGARIANS WOULD WELCOME TRUMP WIN

Fully 51% of all respondents in a recent survey by Real-PR 93 said they thought Hungary would benefit if Donald Trump won the November US presidential election, the pollster said in a statement on Tuesday. Among right-wing supporters, 78% said they would welcome a Trump victory, while 26% of leftist respondents shared that opinion. Twenty-three percent of all respondents said Hungary would benefit from Joe Biden's re-election. Real-PR 93 has gauged Hungarian voters' support for Trump for the second time, the first one conducted in October-November last year. The first survey indicated 47% support for Trump, the report said, adding that the ratio could further increase in future. The pollster said support for Trump was higher among older respondents, with 47% in the 18-39 age group, 49% among the middle-aged and 58% among people over 60. The survey was conducted by phone with a sample of 1,000 adults between Feb 26 and 28.

HUNGARY GDP FLAT IN Q4, CONTRACTS 0.9% IN 2023, KSH CONFIRMS

Hungary's GDP stagnated in the fourth quarter and contracted 0.9% in the full year, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) confirmed in a second reading of the data on Tuesday. Adjusted for calendar

year effects, GDP grew by an annual 0.5% in Q4, while it dropped by an adjusted 0.7% in the full year. Quarter on quarter, GDP was flat, adjusted for seasonal and calendar year effects.

ÉVOSZ PUTS HOME COMPLETIONS AROUND 15,000 IN 2024

The number of homes completed in 2024 could approach 15,000, construction industry association ÉVOSZ said on Tuesday. ÉVOSZ noted that around 20,000 homes were under construction at present. The association projected that some 180,000 homes could be renovated during the year. ÉVOSZ chairman László Koji said both segments were underperforming, adding that 35,000 home completions a year would be "optimal", while the sector had capacity to renovate 200,000 homes annually. The association noted that construction sector

order stock was down 23.5%, and that some of those orders were for projects after 2024. It added that high lending rates, a shortage of skilled labour and higher building material prices were also holding back the sector's performance. ÉVOSZ acknowledged a drop in state and local council orders, but said that would free up capacity for private sector work. ÉVOSZ is pressing for the relaunch of the National Bank of Hungary's Green Home Programme and urges a home renovation programme that would contain a subsidised credit element.

CRIME RING BUSTED FOR FORCING HUNGARIAN WOMEN INTO PROSTITUTION IN BELGIUM

Belgian and Hungarian authorities have busted a crime ring suspected

of luring Hungarian women to Belgium under false pretenses and forcing them into prostitution there, the official website of the Hungarian police said on Tuesday. Law enforcement arrested a 34-year-old Hungarian woman suspected of having recruited at least 20 financially struggling young women since 2018, promising them cleaning and other jobs in Oostende. She organised their journey and later managed the advertisement of their sexual services online, police.hu said. Some of the women were under 18 when they were recruited, police.hu said. Police have also arrested a man suspected of having lured the women, later forcing them into prostitution, taking their money, and threatening and assaulting some of them. The two suspects are awaiting extradition to Belgium. Belgian police have arrested another six people and the ring leader in Belgium, and seized 35,000 euros in cash, gold and luxury cars, the statement said.