

PHOTO OF THE DAY



PM Viktor Orbán consults with President Tamás Sulyok

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the wars in Middle East, Ukraine

TOP STORY

HUNGARY BACKS BOSNIA'S EU INTEGRATION

Hungary will provide Bosnia and Herzegovina all the support it needs to move forward in its EU integration process, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after meeting his Bosnian counterpart in Budapest on Wednesday.

At a joint press conference with Elmedin Konaković, Szijjártó said that in Hungary's view, "the European Union these days needs the integration of the Western Balkan countries more than they need EU membership". He said that an action plan was signed on "sharing knowledge" on the integration process with Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had submitted its application for membership 8 years ago. "It is now time to make real progress," Szijjártó added. Under the plan, 50 experts will participate in training at the Hungarian Diplomatic Academy who are potential candidates to play a key role in Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU accession talks. Speeding up the EU integration of the Western Balkans and advancing Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession talks will be an important objective of Hungary's upcoming EU presidency in the second half of 2024, said Szijjártó. He said Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability was also key for Hungary, adding that Brussels's "pro-migration policy" was making things difficult for the entire Western Balkan region.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY-SERBIA RELATIONS 'AT HISTORIC BEST'

Hungary-Serbia relations are at their historic best, as ethnic Hungarian communities beyond the borders represent a resource in cooperation with neighbouring countries, the foreign minister said on Wednesday. The ministry cited Peter Szijjártó telling a press conference after meeting Bálint Pásztor, head of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (VMSZ), that ethnic Hungarians were a focal point for Hungary's foreign policy. This is why an ethnic Hungarian community leader gets invited to the meeting of ambassadors every year, which has been the case also this year, the minister said. He congratulated Pásztor on his party's performance at the elections in Serbia in December and said the results represented a great achievement, especially in the current period full of challenges. "Serbia, Vojvodina and the VMSZ prove together that it is a correct foreign policy strategy to develop as good relations with neighbouring countries as possible," said Szijjártó. "Because the better the relations are with a neighbouring country, the better the situation of ethnic Hungarians living there will be," he added. "Vojvodina Hungarians are proof that it is correct to consider Hungarian communities beyond the borders a resource in building good

bilateral relations," Szijjártó said. He said that in planning its foreign policy strategy, the government always gives priority to building good relations with neighbouring states and always stands up for ethnic Hungarian communities living there. The minister highlighted VMSZ's role in developing Hungarian-Serbian cooperation, pointing out the alliance's proposal on a comprehensive economic development programme in Serbia's northernmost region. He noted that the Hungarian government has so far supported 14,000 local businesses with 80 billion forints (EUR 203m) that has generated investments worth 170 billion forints, and pledged the continuation of the programme. Szijjártó said that cross-border infrastructure also played an important role in bilateral relations, which is why on VMSZ's request a decision had been made to keep the Röszke-Horgos 2 border crossing open 24 hours a day. Additionally, the development of a border crossing at Hercegszántó will be started in the near future, with the help of Interreg resources, he said. Szijjártó also said that during its upcoming EU presidency, Hungary's government will focus on speeding up EU enlargement and fighting illegal migration. "Hungary has always stood on Serbia's side when it comes to EU enlargement, and would like to have Serbia as a member of the EU as soon as possible, which would also serve the interests of Vojvodina Hungarians," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: LIBERAL MAINSTREAM FAILS TO DISQUALIFY TRUMP FROM PRESIDENTIAL RACE

The "liberal mainstream's master plan" in the United States to disqualify Donald Trump from the presidential race "has failed", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said at a press conference on a different subject on Wednesday. Answering a question in connection with the US presidential election and the US Supreme Court's decision clearing Trump to run for president, Szijjártó welcomed "the failure of the liberal mainstream's master plan" to disqualify a non-liberal candidate with a good chance to win and that the Democrats will have to compete against Trump "in a democratic race". "This is a very important victory from the point of view of the rule of law," Szijjártó said, adding that it was regrettable that no statements had been made by Brussels this time on "how it was a violation of the rule of law and European values -- which we regard as universal values -- that a decision on who can or cannot run as a candidate in the primaries, or in the presidential election, could have been taken by an official in a certain American state". "But this is their business ... what is certain is that we have always respected decisions made by the people of other countries concerning who they elect for leaders, including in the United States," Szijjártó said. The minister said

Hungary's bilateral relations had been at their peak during the presidency of Donald Trump, adding that Hungary would again like to have "the best ever" political relations with the United States.

ORBÁN CONSULTS WITH PRESIDENT SULYOK

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with President Tamás Sulyok at the presidential office on Wednesday, his press chief said. The prime minister and the president plan to hold regular talks to discuss the most important geopolitical issues, European and domestic affairs, Bertalan Havasi said.

PRESIDENT SULYOK MEETS MONGOLIA PARLT SPEAKER

President Tamás Sulyok held talks with Gombojav Zandanshatar, chairman of Mongolia's State Great Khural, at the Sándor Palace in Budapest on Wednesday. Sulyok said both countries' interests lay in a peaceful coexistence, and political strategies should be based on connectivity rather than the formation of blocs. At their meeting, Sulyok and Zandanshatar discussed bilateral economic and trade ties along with education, cultural and tourism matters. The president said Hungarian businesses were prepared to contribute to the success of Mongolia's reforms, mainly in the areas of agriculture and water management. Hungary and Mongolia's "deep-rooted

friendship" is based on mutual respect, Sulyok said, adding that Hungary aimed to remain a bridge between Asia and Europe. They touched on the Stipendium Hungaricum agreement for 2024-2026 under which Hungary offers scholarships to 200 Mongolian university students and Mongolia offers scholarships to 10 Hungarian students a year. They noted the respective Mongolian and Hungarian language courses at Eötvös Loránd University and the National University of Mongolia, along with the existing twinning agreements between Hungarian and Mongolian municipalities. Hungary and Mongolia established diplomatic relations in 1950.

KÖVÉR MEETS MONGOLIAN COUNTERPART

Speaker of Parliament László Kövér met Gombojav Zandanshatar, his Mongolian counterpart, for talks in Budapest on Wednesday. After the talks, Kövér said Mongolia was an important, traditional partner for Hungary in the north-eastern Asian region. Bilateral and cultural ties are extremely good, while business ties need to be raised to the same level, he added. Parliament's press office quoted Kövér as saying at the talks that similarities in the traditions of the two nations create a good basis for further deepening friendly ties. Mongolia's rich historical and cultural heritage is a great asset, which contributes to

the cultural diversity of Eurasians, Kövér said. Mongolia's active foreign policy is key for preserving stability in its region, he added. Hungary follows Mongolia's development with a loyal interest, while Hungarian businesses are ready to contribute to Mongolia's success with special regard to agriculture and water management, Kövér said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ HAILS HUNGARY-MONGOLIA COOPERATION

Cooperation between Hungary and Mongolia is close despite the geographical distance between them, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook on Wednesday. Szijjártó noted that Hungary had donated vaccines to Mongolia during the coronavirus pandemic, adding that the two countries also cooperate actively in the areas of agriculture and water management, which last year led to a "record trade turnover". Hungary offers the most university scholarships to Mongolia relative to the size of its population, he said, noting that 903 students had applied for the 200 available scholarships this year. He said the two countries had concluded their talks on an air transport agreement, which had been made all the more important by Mongolia having scrapped the visa requirement for Hungary. Szijjártó noted that Hungary and Mongolia will mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties next year. He said boosting bilateral

cooperation presented an even greater opportunity given that Mongolia has the world's second-biggest reserve of rare-earth elements.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER MEETS MONGOLIAN FINANCE MINISTER

Agriculture Minister István Nagy met Javkhlan Bold, Mongolia's finance minister, in Budapest on Wednesday. The sides signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen relations in agriculture and the food industry, the Ministry of Agriculture said. The partnership agreement covers the modernisation of farm machinery, the preservation of animal genetic resources, irrigation development and forestry issues. Nagy said Hungarian businesses and education institutions were ready to share their experience with the Mongolian partners. The minister said he could see opportunities for bilateral cooperation in agricultural technologies, the poultry sector or seed production. Javkhlan Bold invited István Nagy for an official visit to Mongolia.

VOX LEADER TO SPEAK AT CPAC HUNGARY

Santiago Abascal, the head of Spain's VOX party, will be among the speakers at CPAC Hungary to be held on April 25-26, the head of Hungary's Center for Fundamental Rights, an organiser of the Budapest event, said on Wednesday. Other speakers

from Europe include Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) that won the general elections in November, Tom van Grieken, the head of the Flemish Interest party, and Marek Kuchciński, the former head of the Chancellery of the Polish Prime Minister, Miklós Szánthó said in a statement. Similarly to the two previous CPAC events held in Budapest, the keynote speaker will be Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, he said.

DEUTSCH: MOMENTUM MEPS WORKING TO PREVENT HUNGARY FROM RECEIVING EU FUNDS

MEPs of Hungary's opposition Momentum have been working to prevent Hungary from receiving European Union development funds, ruling Fidesz MEP Tamás Deutsch said on Wednesday, and also suggested that Momentum was acting under instructions from Ferenc Gyurcsány, former PM and head of the Democratic Coalition (DK) party. Referring to recent remarks by Momentum MP Miklós Hajnal, Deutsch insisted that Hajnal had admitted that MEPs Anna Donáth and Katalin Cseh were "working with all their might to prevent Hungarian citizens, teachers, municipalities, SMEs, and health providers from receiving the European funds the country is entitled to". Deutsch said Gyurcsány himself had earlier "boasted" that

his DK party's MEPs "invented the political conditions in legal disguise for the European Commission to blackmail Hungary". MEPs of Fidesz will propose an extraordinary session of parliament's EU affairs committee to look into "the political moves by the dollar left to cause such serious, tangible losses to Hungarian citizens," Deutsch said.

VARGA: HUNGARY ECONOMY TO RETURN TO SUSTAINABLE GROWTH PATH THIS YEAR

The Hungarian economy will return to a path of sustainable growth this year, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said on Wednesday, adding that employment would remain high and unemployment low. Like the government and international credit rating agencies, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) projects that Hungary's economic growth will outpace average European Union growth, Varga said, presenting the OECD's country survey at a press conference held jointly with Secretary-General Mathias Cormann. Citing the survey, Varga said the OECD forecast a GDP growth rate of 2.4% in 2024 and 2.8% next year. Hungary's economic output is now 5% above pre-pandemic levels, while the EU average is 3.5% higher than before the pandemic, the minister said.

He said the OECD had prepared a “professional and well-founded report”, adding that its findings were in line with the government’s assessment, given that organisation was more familiar with the specifics of Hungary’s post-communist economic history.

Cormann welcomed that Hungary had brought down inflation, warning that the risks should not be underestimated and that the central bank needed to be prepared to take the right steps if external conditions required it. As an export-oriented economy, Hungary’s focus should be on improving productivity, competitiveness and technological advancement as well as developing transport and telecommunications infrastructure, the secretary-general said.

CBANK SIGNS COOPERATION PACT WITH MONGOLIAN WATCHDOG

The National Bank of Hungary (NBH) has signed an agreement on joint financial supervision cooperation with the Financial Regulatory Commission of Mongolia (FRC), NBH said on Wednesday. The agreement covers,

among other things, information and knowledge exchange between the authorities, carrying out joint research projects and organising knowledge-sharing events, the central bank said in a statement.

RETAIL SALES RETURN TO GROWTH IN JANUARY

Retail sales in Hungary edged up by an annual 0.6% in January, growing for the first month in a little more than a year, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Wednesday. Retail sales also rose by 0.6% when adjusted for calendar year effects. Adjusted food sales edged up by 0.2%, while non-food sales slipped by 0.9%. Vehicle fuel sales were 4.6% higher. A detailed breakdown of the data shows adjusted retail sales rose at supermarkets, drugstores and pharmacies, petrol stations and webshops, but fell at other shops. Retail sales were flat in a month-on-month comparison. In absolute terms, retail sales came to 1,356 billion forints (EUR 3.4bn) in January. Food sales accounted for 49% of the total, non-food sales for 35% and sales at petrol stations for 16%. Commenting the fresh data, the national economy ministry said it indicated that retail sales had passed the low point and were “in the recovery phase”.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT FALLS BY 3.6% IN JANUARY

Output of Hungary’s industrial sector fell by an annual 3.6% in January, a fraction of the 13.7% decline in the previous month, a first reading of data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Wednesday shows. January output dropped by 4.1% when adjusted for the number of workdays. Output of most manufacturing sector branches declined, with the exception of three, including the coke and refined petroleum products segments, KSH said. In a month-on-month comparison, output edged down a seasonally and workday-adjusted 1.1%.

HUNGARY REPORTS EUR 497 M TRADE SURPLUS IN JANUARY

Hungary had a 497 million euro trade surplus in January, after the balance turned negative for the first time in almost a year in December, a first reading of data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Wednesday shows. Exports fell by an annual 7.4% to 11.422 billion euros. Imports dropped by 14.3% to 10.925 billion euros. Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 78% of Hungary’s exports and 70% of its imports during the month.