

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán addresses the ninth China-Central and Eastern Europe summit

MTV/Press Office of the Prime Minister/Zoltán Fischer

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**President attends V4 anniversary summit in Poland**

**Coronavirus updates**

**European Parliament holds plenary session**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: PANDEMIC BRINGS NEW ERA

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has addressed the ninth China-Central and Eastern Europe summit, addressing topics such as the race for the coronavirus vaccine, constructive cooperation between East and West and world trade.

The conference was held online due to the coronavirus pandemic. Orbán thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for convening the meeting amid trying circumstances. The pandemic, which started a year ago, “wrenched us out of our comfort zones and started a whole new era in world economic and global politics while also posing a dual challenge to governments: they had to protect the lives and jobs of their people at the same time,” Orbán said. Like in the early stages of the pandemic, “the whole world” is competing to buy a commodity in short supply, Orbán said. “At the start of the pandemic, it was masks and ventilators, now it is the vaccine,” he said. The ultimate solution to the crisis will be the vaccine, he said. “It is the lives of our citizens and the revival of our economy that is at stake,” he said, calling for “more constructive East-West cooperation based on mutual respect and good will”. Concluding an agreement between the European Union and China aimed at ensuring mutual protection for investments would be “a good step in that direction”, he added.

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**ORBÁN THANKS CHINA FOR HELP DURING PANDEMIC**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in his address to the ninth China-Central and Eastern Europe summit, said Hungary was grateful to China for its help in view of current challenges, noting Hungary's extensive acquisitions of Chinese medical equipment during the coronavirus pandemic. Chinese companies, he added, had used investment opportunities offered by the Hungarian government, launching projects that "made China Hungary's number one investor in 2020". "We Hungarians support free and fair global trade, which now has more significance than ever before," Orbán said. The fewer the obstacles to economic cooperation, the faster the economy can recover, he added. The prime minister welcomed the establishment of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, saying that hopefully talks could soon start between the regional partnership and the EU on future cooperation. "The 17+1 formula could serve as an engine to achieve that goal," he added.

Orbán paid tribute to the Chinese scientific community for developing coronavirus vaccines and thanked China for allowing Hungarian experts to visit production facilities and consult with Chinese experts. "I have received very reassuring

reports from our delegation whose assessment allowed a licence for the vaccine to be used in Hungary in emergency situations," Orbán said. He said he greatly appreciated the Chinese authorities' cooperative stance during negotiations that led to Hungary's purchasing the vaccine, adding that he expected the first shipment to arrive next week. The prime minister also said that the pandemic had not prevented Hungary from performing its obligations in the 17+1 group. He noted that planning for the Belgrade-Budapest railway project was under way, alongside preparations to open Budapest's Fudan International University.

**GULYÁS: REPORTS OF EC DOCUMENT ON HUNGARY PROCUREMENT LAWS 'FAKE NEWS'**

The Prime Minister's chief of staff said that reports of the European Commission requiring amendments to Hungary's public procurement laws were "fake news". Reuters news agency reported on Monday that it had seen a document in which the EC had called on Hungary to amend public procurement regulations to prevent "systemic irregularities" in the use of the European Union's recovery fund. Reuters reported that the EC document issued on Jan. 26 requested specific changes to Hungary's public procurement legislation, especially concerning

data transparency and accessibility. Gergely Gulyás told MTI on Tuesday that Hungary had received no such request, whether official or informal, adding that the government was cooperating closely with the EC on the use of the recovery fund and on the EU's next multiannual financial framework. Hungary is set to receive 6.3 billion euros from the fund if the country submits a detailed plan by the end of April on how it intends to make use of the funding and the EU accepts the plan. He called on the commission to clarify the situation and reject the "allegations" because "fake news of that sort undermines and threatens the public trust needed to ratify the decree on [member states'] own resources". Citing EC data, Gulyás said decision-making in Hungarian public procurement practices was considered "very good", while transparency was "outstanding", with 98% of the information on such procedures available to the public. The number of procurement procedures without publication has fallen from 3,600 to 274 in the past six years, Gulyás said. Based on the internal market scoreboard, the EU classified Hungary's public procurement system as "average" in 2019, he said, adding that Hungary ranked among the top ten member states in that area. The government has nevertheless passed a resolution to push the ratio of single-tenderer procedures to below 15%, he said. "We were the ones who pushed for



the EU to set up concrete regulations to protect its financial interests rather than using vague criteria like the rule of law," Gulyás said.

### **MÜLLER: RUSSIAN COVID VACCINE TO BE USED FIRST IN BUDAPEST**

Inoculations in Hungary using the Russian Sputnik V vaccine will start in Budapest, the chief medical officer said. Cecília Müller told a press conference that 560 GPs in the city will each be asked to select five of their patients who do not suffer from any chronic underlying illnesses, who would then be referred to vaccination points to receive the jab. Fully 2,800 doses of the Russian vaccine are currently available, she said. She added that a further amount of the vaccine enough to inoculate 20,000 people were undergoing laboratory testing before use. GPs will also be using the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine this week, Müller said, adding that 85,410 doses of that vaccine were expected to arrive on Thursday, alongside 21,600 doses of Moderna. Family practitioners will also start inoculating patients with chronic illnesses aged between 18 and 60 with the AstraZeneca vaccine, Müller said. Fully 2,040 GPs will receive doses for 10 patients each, she said. So far, 291,396 people have received at least one shot, while 110,395 people have been fully inoculated, she said. Müller warned that though the figures indicated an improving tendency,

"the ratio of positive cases within all tests is increasing". The number of those in hospital and patients on ventilators have also increased, she said, adding that traces of the virus in sewage water were stagnating or increasing. "This gives cause for some concern," she said. The British variant of the virus has so far been detected in 24 samples, while the Brazilian or South African variants have not been reported, Müller said.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY DISAGREES WITH INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT'S RULING**

Hungary disagrees with the International Criminal Court's ruling passed last Friday which found that the court has jurisdiction over Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said. Szijjártó said on Facebook that he had consulted about the issue with his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi over the phone. He added that the Hungarian government had already indicated during the procedure that it believed Palestine had no jurisdiction to prosecute Israeli citizens. "We have always supported Israel's right to self-defence and believe that peace in the region can only result from talks based on mutual respect," Szijjártó said, adding that "the International Criminal Court's ruling does not bring the sides closer to this". The Hague-based ICC Pre-Trial Chamber decided

last Friday that the court's territorial jurisdiction extends to the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, namely Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

### **OFFICIAL: HUNGARY FACES 'CHALLENGING YEAR' IN EU**

Hungary is bracing for a "tough year in Brussels' courts", the recently appointed state secretary for European Union affairs told the Tuesday issue of Magyar Nemzet. Oszkár Ökrös said conflicts on issues like migration and "identity politics" were expected to escalate in 2021, while Hungary continued to be a "top student" in issues like digitalisation, EU defence cooperation and climate policy. Hungary will need to be "vigilant" as "Brussels continues to push for a redistribution of migrants," he said. "We do not need more or less of an EU, but a smart EU," he said. Hungary is working to create a "multipolar EU" rather than a system of central and peripheral states, Ökrös said. In such a system, all member states would find the form of cooperation most suited to them, he said. Ökrös added that "overblown" Brussels institutions and the political mainstream of pre-2004 member states had embraced the concept of a federal EU and started to view this as the only path towards integration. "In our view the point of integration ... is not curbing or assimilating national traits but giving them space," he

said. This year Hungary will also take over the rotating presidency of the Visegrad Group, a post with serious EU-related tasks, Ökrös said. The election campaign in Hungary will add to the challenges, he added.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY INTERESTED IN CLOSEST POSSIBLE TIES WITH UK**

Hungary's interest lies in ensuring that its relations with the United Kingdom remain as strong as possible after Brexit, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with his British counterpart Dominic Raab. Hungary is an ally to the UK on a number of issues, Szijjártó said in a video on Facebook. Britain is Hungary's sixth most important investor with 900 British companies employing more than 55,000 Hungarians, the minister said. The UK is also Hungary's 12th most important trading partner, he added. British businesses, he said, had demonstrated their loyalty to their Hungarian employees during the coronavirus pandemic, with five UK firms investing more than 5.5 million euros in Hungary last year. The government supported those investments with 2.7 million euros, he added.

Szijjártó said he and Raab had also discussed the situation around Covid-19 vaccines. "We still believe it's shameful that the European Union waited weeks and months to approve AstraZeneca's vaccine," the minister

said. "Had the authorisation been granted sooner, we'd be further along in Hungary as well." Szijjártó noted that Hungary received a shipment of the AstraZeneca jab last Saturday, with the next batch scheduled to be delivered on Feb. 13, adding that the UK had the largest and most diverse stock of Covid vaccines. Hungary is doing everything it can to ensure that its citizens can be inoculated as quickly as possible, he said. Because Hungary has contracted vaccine doses from AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, China's Sinopharm and Russia, the vaccination campaign can be speeded up significantly over the coming weeks, he said.

Szijjártó said he and Raab had also discussed support for persecuted Christians, which he said was an important goal for both governments. Talks also touched on Hungary's presidency of the Council of the EU set for the second half of 2024, during which Szijjártó said the country hopes to focus on the protection of national minorities, supporting families and interreligious dialogue. Szijjártó said Raab had assured him of the UK's cooperation on those issues and promised to pay a visit to Hungary this year. The minister noted that 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Hungary and the United Kingdom, which they intend to celebrate in a way that will be worthy of the occasion.

### **OFFICIAL: SECONDARY SCHOOL FINAL EXAMS CAN BE HELD SAFELY IN SPRING**

Final exams in Hungary's secondary schools could be safely held in the spring provided that current precautionary measures are maintained, the state secretary for public education said. Zoltán Maruzsa said that written tests could be held with no more than ten students in one classroom, adding that physical distancing would also be possible during viva voces. Maruzsa said that last spring nearly 80,000 took their exams without triggering an outbreak of Covid-19, while in the autumn 30,000 students did so without harmful consequences.

### **HUNGARY RECORDS 94 CORONAVIRUS FATALITIES, 1,079 NEW INFECTIONS**

Fully 94 Covid patients, generally elderly and suffering from an underlying illness, died over the past 24 hours, while 1,079 new infections were officially registered, bringing the total number of infected to 378,734, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said on Tuesday. The death toll has risen to 13,249, while 283,282 people have made a recovery. The number of active infections has declined to 82,203, while there are 3,792 hospitalised Covid patients, 304 on a ventilator. Altogether 16,850 people are in

official home quarantine, and the number of tests carried out has risen to 3,281,992. Hungary began rolling out the coronavirus vaccine in December. So far, 291,396 people have received their first jab, and 110,395 have been fully inoculated. The government has extended coronavirus-related restrictions until March 1. Most infections have been registered in Budapest (70,267) and Pest County (47,209) so far, followed by the counties of Hajdú-Bihar (21,366), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (21,199) and Győr-Moson-Sopron (21,037). The county least affected by the infection is Tolna (8,350).

## **KLUBRÁDIÓ LOSES APPEAL TO RENEW LICENCE**

A Budapest court has rejected an appeal by private broadcaster Klubrádió against a decision by Hungary's media authority not to renew its licence. The Budapest Municipal Court said in a statement that under the relevant law, the Media Council of the National Media and Communications Authority (NMHH) had no room to consider Klubrádió's appeal due to "repeated offences" committed by the broadcaster. Last September, the NMHH announced that it would call another tender for the 92.9 MHz frequency in Budapest, as it was not renewing Klubrádió's licence due to its violations of Hungary's media law. The licence of the station popular with opposition listeners expires on Feb. 14.

The court noted that the Media Council's decision not to renew Klubrádió's licence had been based on its findings of the broadcaster's offences which Klubrádió had not challenged. Because the ruling on Klubrádió's repeated offences had been final, neither the Media Council, nor the court could deliberate its appeal, the statement said. The NMHH said in September that during its seven years on the air on the 92.9 MHz frequency, Klubrádió had violated the media law on multiple occasions. It said the broadcaster had accepted the rulings on its offences and had paid the fines that had been levied on it. The authority later said that it had not "stripped" Klubrádió of the 92.9 MHz frequency, pointing out that frequencies are allocated to radio stations through tenders. In October, the NMHH said Klubrádió had every chance of success in its bid for the 92.9 MHz frequency, arguing that criteria for a successful bid include experience in providing a media service. Klubrádió, it said, had a built-in advantage, having already broadcast on that frequency.

## **HUNGARY RECEIVES 500,000TH DOSE OF PFIZER-BIONTECH VACCINE**

Hungary has received the 500,000th dose of Pfizer-BioNTech's Comirnaty coronavirus vaccine, Pfizer's Hungarian subsidiary said. The first shipment of the vaccine arrived in Hungary on December 26 last year and further

shipments followed every week since, the statement said. More than 85,000 doses of the vaccine arrived in the eighth shipment on Tuesday, totalling 500,000 delivered so far, it added. Under a current agreement, Hungary is set to receive 6.6 million doses of the Comirnaty vaccine by the end of 2021, Pfizer said. In line with Hungarian health authorities' reports, 280,000 people have received Pfizer and BioNTech's coronavirus vaccine in their first shot and more than 100,000 have also received their second jab of the vaccine. Pfizer and BioNTech plan to significantly increase the volume of vaccine supplies to the European Union from the second quarter of this year, the statement added.

## **CORONAVIRUS PRESENCE IN HUNGARY WASTEWATER RISING AGAIN**

Average concentrations of the novel coronavirus in Hungary's wastewater systems have begun rising again, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said, citing data from the National Public Health Institute. The average concentration of the novel coronavirus detected in wastewater samples from Budapest, Győr, Miskolc and Székesfehérvár have shown a rising trend, while concentrations of the virus are down in Békéscsaba and Kecskemét, the website said. The tests show a moderate presence of the virus in the sewage systems of Budapest, Debrecen, Győr, Kaposvár, Miskolc,

Nyíregyháza, Székesfehérvár and Szekszárd, while other cities had lower concentrations, it added.

### **EXPERTS ESTABLISH HUNGARIAN ROYAL FAMILY'S DNA PROFILE**

Experts of the National History Research Institute (MKI) have identified the DNA profile of the Hunyadi family, the family of Hungary's renaissance King Matthias I who reigned in Hungary between 1458 and 1490, the head of MKI's archaeology institute told public Kossuth Rádió. Miklós Makoldi said that the experts had used bone samples of John and Christopher Hunyadi, Matthias's son and grandson, who were buried in a Pauline monastery in Croatia, and whose graves were left undisturbed over the centuries. "We now have the DNA profile to identify further members of the Hunyadi family," Makoldi said, highlighting the possibility of finding the king's remains, now in an ossarium in

Székesfehérvár, in western Hungary, together with the bones of other kings and high officials.

### **LISZT CHAMBER ORCHESTRA ANNOUNCES LONG-TERM PLAN**

Hungary's celebrated Liszt Ferenc Chamber Orchestra has developed a long-term artistic and business plan, aiming to find a foothold as a market player and to draw a diverse audience, the orchestra's directors said. Judit Körmendy-Ékes, the head of the orchestra's board, told an online press conference that the orchestra will use state funding to lay the groundwork to become a market player. "It's not enough for an orchestra to simply provide a high artistic standard; it must also operate as a professional market player." Concert cellist István Várdai, who is the orchestra's artistic director, said the group is planning to perform transcripts, new pieces by contemporary composers and to cooperate with other artistic disciplines to "have the music reach as many

people as possible". The orchestra will perform concerts on three continents over the coming three years, Várdai said.

On March 10, the Liszt Chamber Orchestra will give a free online concert from Budapest's Liszt Academy.

### **PEOPLE SMUGGLER FLEEING FROM POLICE KILLED IN ACCIDENT**

An alleged people smuggler was hit by a car and died on the M6 motorway in western Hungary as he tried to flee police officers, local police reported. The man, who has yet to be identified, was transporting 5 Syrian nationals without travel documents in his car. Seeing police officers signalling to stop, he jumped out of his car and climbed across the steel fence between the lanes, but a car coming from the opposite direction hit him, the police said on its website. The man was driving a car with Hungarian plates. The accident happened in the Besnyő area.