

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime ministers of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia after a summit in Ljubljana

MTI/PM's office/Xivien Cher Benko

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coronavirus updates

Opposition pre-election campaign events

Multiarts festival in Győr

TOP STORY

ÁDER ADDRESSES THREE SEAS SUMMIT

Hungarian President János Áder highlighted the importance of transparency in the decision-making process of the Three Seas Initiative at a summit of the forum's member states in Sofia.

The president noted that enhancing the infrastructure of TSI's former socialist member states was one of the main goals of the forum at the time of its establishment six years ago. He said the investment fund set up within the initiative had approved three projects which were not among the member states' proposals, adding that the investment projects carried out by TSI should serve the wider region as a whole. Áder said that the list of projects to be assisted from the fund included eight energy, six transport and two digitalisation schemes that Hungary deemed crucial. He noted that Hungarian companies had implemented a number of infrastructure, energy and climate protection projects in the region. He made special mention of the construction of a section of the Via Carpathia motorway and a new bridge between Hungary and Slovakia. He added that Hungary had already linked its gas pipelines with those of six of its neighbours. The president also noted that Hungary was working to make 90-95% of its energy production carbon dioxide free by 2030.

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ORBÁN: HUNGARY TO BACK SLOVENIA'S EU PRESIDENCY

The European Union will have to address a number of serious issues over the next six months, but it is fortunate that the European Council will be headed by Slovenia during this period, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said after a summit of the Visegrad Group countries and Slovenia in Ljubljana on Friday.

Addressing a news conference, Orbán identified the relaunch of the economy as the bloc's most pressing issue. This, he said, required investments, security and the expansion of markets. The key to boosting investments, he said, was keeping taxes level or cutting them. Security is conditional on central Europe maintaining a joint position on its opposition to migrant redistribution quotas, he added. The prime minister also said that the EU markets could only be expanded if the Western Balkan countries are admitted into the bloc as soon as possible, thereby making the EU stronger. "Over the coming months, Hungary will do everything it can to support Slovenia's EU presidency so that it is successful," Orbán said.

The cooperation of central European countries is "no theory but practice," Orbán said, pointing to the "exemplary" aid the countries provided to each other during the coronavirus pandemic.

Slovenia, with Janez Janša as prime minister, has acted as EU president

once before, Orbán said, adding that "Jansa, as one of the anti-Communist camp, has the historical perspective to assess European matters."

In response to a question, Orbán said migration had two sources: Asia and the Sahel region. "We are withdrawing troops from Afghanistan and cutting the number of men in Sahel, too," he said, referring to NATO's recent withdrawal from the central Asian country. The decision will have consequences, "everyone will have to prepare for migration waves from Afghanistan," Orbán warned.

The European Union should focus on "important issues" such as the pandemic, the restart of the bloc's economy and migration, Orbán said. Instead, the European Union is "waging a rule-of-law jihad to divert attention from real problems," Orbán insisted, adding that the rule of law should not be used as a political weapon, he added.

Orbán said the European Union's situation has changed since the mid-00's, when "there were new member states and old ones." By now, the rift is between countries with "high state debt, low growth and scores of migrants destabilising security, and those which keep debt under control, grow swiftly and have protected themselves from migrants and so they are stable," he said, adding that central Europe belongs to the latter category. Janša's "great task" is to unite those two "very different" camps, Orbán said. Slovenia, as "the westernmost central European country," is ideally suited to the task, he said.

Janša told the same news conference that since its accession to the EU, Slovenia has cooperated well with the Visegrad Group and often "coordinated priorities". As the country holding the rotating presidency of the European Council since July 1, Slovenia has a responsibility to find solutions to the challenges the bloc is facing, he said.

Janša thanked the Visegrad Group countries for their support of Slovenia during the coronavirus epidemic. "While the European Union failed to organise aid, these countries supported Slovenia with shipments of protective gear and vaccines," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: V4 TO SPEED UP DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The Visegrad Group countries plan to further and speed up their development plans, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Ljubljana, after a meeting of the heads of government of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. One key development is a high-speed railway between the Visegrad countries, he said, adding that such railways are scarce commodities in central Europe. The new railway line is planned to link Warsaw and Budapest via the Czech Republic and Bratislava, Szijjártó said. The feasibility study for the Hungarian section has already been completed, and the V4 working group for transport issues is convening in September, he added.

The 170-kilometre section will mostly follow a new route, south of



the Vertes Hills, to keep environmental stress the lowest possible, and will have a direct link to the western European high-speed railway network near the triple boundary of Hungary, Austria and Slovakia, Szijjártó said. The track will be suitable for maximum speeds ranging from 230 to 320km/h pending the terrain, he said, adding that travel time from Budapest to Bratislava will be reduced by an hour and a half, to Prague by three and a half hours and to Warsaw by five and a half hours. Once completed, the high-speed railway will have a capacity to carry 20 million passengers a year, Szijjártó said. Further, it may help reduce annual carbon emission by 400,000 tonnes in central Europe, he said.

HUNGARY RECORDS 44 NEW COVID INFECTIONS

Fully 44 new coronavirus infections were registered over the past 24 hours, while there were no deaths, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Friday. So far 5,529,428 people have received a first jab, while 5,145,484 have been fully vaccinated. The number of active infections has declined to 37,350, while hospitals are treating 87 Covid patients, 13 of whom need respiratory assistance. There are 1,629 people in official quarantine, while 6,192,388 tests have been officially carried out. Since the first outbreak, 808,437 infections have been registered, while fatalities have risen to 30,004. Fully 741,083 people have made a recovery. So far, most infections have been registered in

Budapest and Pest County, followed by the counties of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Hajdú-Bihar.

GOVT GIVES WATCHDOG EXPANDED POWERS TO CURB HIGHER CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS PRICES

Hungary's Competition Office (GVH) has said the government has expanded its legal powers to probe distortions that are raising prices on the building materials market. The government has mandated GVH's chairman to order expedited sectoral reviews, drawing on mandatory feedback from market players to determine the reasons for distortions of competition and take necessary measures. The special rules will require tighter deadlines for affected businesses, too. Hungary's government has announced a number of measures to weed out price-gougers and ensure sufficient domestic supply of building materials as prices rise.

GOVT PLEDGES HUF 200 BN TO BOOSTING BUSINESS PRODUCTIVITY

The government will invite bids to disburse 200 billion forints (EUR 558.9m) in support of boosting the productivity of micro, small and medium-sized companies outside Budapest, the state secretary for European Union development policy at the human resources ministry said.

The grant scheme covered by the GINOP Plus economic and innovation programme will be the first one in which companies based in Pest County will be eligible to submit bids, Eszter Vitályos told a press conference, noting that the county is now eligible to apply for European Union development funding independently of Budapest. The first round of bidding will run from July 12 to 19, with further rounds planned in October and January, Vitályos said.

FINANCE MINISTER: HUNGARY HEALTH INDUSTRY SUPPORT SCHEME TO SAVE 5,700 JOBS

The Hungarian government's health industry support scheme will help generate some 86 billion forints' (EUR 240.3m) worth of investments in the country, saving a total of 5,700 jobs, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said. The government is supporting health industry companies with 66 billion forints, Varga said after inaugurating fresh upgrades at two health industry plants. The support scheme aims to establish a "completely new industry in Hungary" that can generate up to 170-180 billion forints in revenues a year, he added. Hungary has managed to become self-reliant in the production of face masks, the mass manufacture of the antiviral drug favipiravir and the production of medical equipment and disinfectants in less than a year, the minister said. Besides being self-reliant,

Hungary also wants to promote the long-term growth and boost the export capacity of its health industry, he said.

STIMULUS LIFTS BUDGET DEFICIT TO HUF 1,704.5 BN IN JUNE

Hungary's cash flow-based budget deficit, excluding local councils, reached 1,704.5 billion forints (EUR 4.8bn) at the end of June, widening on stimulus measures, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary release of data on Friday. "Recent measures, such as wage support, tax breaks and pension supplements, have left significant resources in the economy," the ministry said.

HUNGARY INNOVATION INDEX UP 3 POINTS FROM LAST YEAR

Hungary's summary innovation index on the European Commission's annual European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) has improved by three points to 76.4 since last year, and the country has retained

place 22, the innovation and technology ministry said. The comparative analysis of innovation performance of 27 EU countries and a further 11 European states, published in late June, categorises Hungary as an "emerging innovator", making progress mainly in the fields of "Sales impacts, Digitalisation and Linkages". Improving broadband coverage and government support for business R&D were among the fields laying the groundwork for substantial growth in innovation performance between 2019 and 2021, the report said.

Commenting on the report, László Palkovics, the minister of innovation and technology, said "results in domestic R&D are a baseline for strengthening a knowledge-based, high value-added economy and for sustainable growth in Hungary."

Compared to the base year 2014, Hungary's performance has improved in nine areas, the statement said. This year's three-point improvement comes on the back of a similar growth last year. The ministry's work on establishing a "high-tech green economy, an innovation ecosystem

focusing on universities and strengthening the competitiveness of higher education" are mirrored in the results of the scoreboard, the statement said. "The strong performance improvement between 2019 and 2021 is the result of improved performance on Foreign doctorate students, Broadband penetration, Venture capital, Government support for business R&D, Product and Business process innovators," and other fields, the scoreboard said.

TRADE VOLUME CONTINUES DOUBLE-DIGIT EXPANSION IN MAY

Hungary's trade volume continued to grow at a rapid pace in May, albeit from a low base, when pandemic shutdowns still impacted a number of sectors, data released by the Central Statistical Office show. Exports rose by an annual 37.9% to 9.397 billion euros, while imports climbed 38.2% to 9.300 billion euros. The 97 million euro trade surplus edged up from 87 million euros in the base period.