

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Visegrad Group heads of state meet in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

NATO foreign ministers meet in Brussels

Stats office reports on Sept wages

Regőczi Foundation board head Anita Herczegh, the First Lady, visits Pákozd

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

ÁDER: EU VALUES, BORDERS MUST BE PROTECTED

Europe is facing increasing migration pressure and the EU must prepare to protect its borders and common values, the Hungarian president said at a meeting of the Visegrad Group (V4) heads of state.

Speaking at a press conference held jointly with his Polish and Slovak counterparts, János Áder said the three Visegrad partners had assured Poland of their solidarity. They have also told Poland that it can rely on the political and technical support of the other three V4 countries, and even police reinforcements. The press conference was joined by Miloš Zeman, the Czech president, online.

Noting the crises on the Belarusian borders with Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, Áder noted the events on the Hungarian border in 2015, saying Poland and the other two V4 countries supported Hungary “when we were in trouble”. He said the EU could not afford to delay its response to these crises. Referring to the situation in Afghanistan, parts of Africa and Asia, as well as the effects of climate change, the president said the pressure of migration on Europe was mounting. All V4 countries are battling the same problems, such as a notable proportion of the adult population still “refusing to be vaccinated ... despite all the warnings and arguments based on common sense,” he said.

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ÁDER: V4 FASTEST GROWING REGION IN EU

President János Áder said the Visegrad Group of countries comprised the fastest growing region in the EU even in the midst of Covid. Its member states handled the economic fallout with the lowest losses and were the quickest off the starting block in relaunching their economies, he added. “We have something to be proud of,” he said, adding that over the next thirty years, “we have something to build on”.

In response to a question, Áder said the Hungarian government did not plan to make vaccinations compulsory.

The V4 leaders in a joint statement today called the Belarusian regime’s actions and its violation of fundamental human rights “unacceptable”. The Belarusian authorities have full responsibility for the lives and health of those who have been taken to their country, the statement said.

On the topic of the coronavirus pandemic, Áder underlined the joint statement adopted by the V4’s presidents advising people who have not yet been vaccinated to take up the jab. In the statement, they have declared that vaccination is the only effective way to protect against Covid-19.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: YES TO ALL JABS, NO TO MIGRATION

International organisations should cease their “hypocritical policy” of

supporting migration while not allowing full vaccine coverage, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Geneva on Monday. Attending the extraordinary general assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the annual session of the International Council on International Migration (IOM), Szijjártó said that authorisation of vaccines across the board failed to materialise, while support was given for migration processes that would lead to the further rapid spread of Covid-19. “It’s high time international organisations abandon their hypocritical policies. Right now they don’t want to allow [the full spectrum of] vaccines while they are supporting migration,” a statement by the foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying. The question of which vaccines are licenced and which are not should not be political, the minister said. The more vaccines are available, the better people will be protected and the less likely the virus will spread, he added.

CABINET CHIEF: GOVT FIRMLY REJECTS LGBTQ PROPAGANDA TARGETED AT CHILDREN

The government firmly rejects any LGBTQ propaganda aimed at children and will conduct “a robust campaign” for the national referendum to be held on the issue next year, Antal Rogán, the cabinet chief, said at his annual hearing in parliament’s justice committee. “The government’s position is clear: everyone should participate in the referendum

on the child protection law and answer ‘no’ to all four questions,” he said. The government does not want to interfere in anyone’s life, as making decisions on sexual identity is a private issue for all adults. But it “most resolutely rejects” LGBTQ propaganda targeted at children, the cabinet chief said.

Rogán said the estimated cost of the referendum was 5 billion forints (EUR 13.6m) if it were held simultaneously with the general election next spring (12 billion forints if it were held separately). “All reasonable arguments are in favour of a simultaneous vote, but the government is prepared for both eventualities and would provide the required funds to the National Election Office in either case,” he said. The final date of the referendum will be set by President János Áder, he said.

Referring to a government campaign urging Hungarians to take up a booster jab against the coronavirus, Rogán said: “We’re employing all available means to ensure that 70% of those who have been fully vaccinated gets their third jab by the end of January,” he said. The public information campaign reaching out to as many people as possible as well as personalised messages would be a more effective way of achieving the government’s goal than making vaccination compulsory, he said. Citing preliminary tests by the national public health centre NNK, Rogán said that the vaccines in use in Hungary would provide adequate protection against the latest (Omicron) variant of coronavirus for those vaccinated with a booster jab. Rogán said Pfizer

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vaccines for the 5-11 age group will arrive in Hungary on Dec. 20, and parents are encouraged to have their kids vaccinated.

ORBÁN IN TALKS WITH OECD CHIEF, EC VICE-PRES

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Mathias Cormann, head of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in his office on Monday, the PM's press chief said. Cormann is on an official visit to Hungary at the invitation of Finance Minister Mihály Varga, who also attended Monday's meeting. State secretary for financial affairs Gábor Gion said in an op-ed in the daily Magyar Nemzet on Monday that the OECD secretary-general's visit was an "excellent opportunity" for the Hungarian government to express its views on the most important issues and learn about the coming economic challenges. Gion highlighted climate change and the transition to a carbon-neutral world as two of the most critical issues following the economic recovery.

Orbán also met Maroš Šefčovič, vice-president of the European Commission, for talks on topical European and economic affairs, the prime minister's press chief said. The discussion focused on post-pandemic economic recovery, the competitiveness of European industry, the prospects of developing vehicle and battery production in Hungary, and promoting the spread of e-mobility. The meeting was attended by Minister of Innovation and Technology László Palkovics.

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS FOR EU HELP TO DEFEND NORTH AFRICA, MIDDLE EAST BORDERS

The European Union should launch a comprehensive financial and technical programme to support the north African and Middle Eastern countries in defending their borders, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Barcelona. Addressing a regional forum of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), Szijjártó said he expected growing migration pressure from the southern regions of Africa. "While Europe is facing several simultaneous challenges, more and more migrants are arriving on the continent from three directions," he said. The position of the Hungarian government remains unchanged, Szijjártó said. Rather than being encouraged to leave their country, those in need should be assisted by eliminating the root causes of migration in their homeland, he said. Europe should aim to halt migration as far as possible from its borders, for which effective cooperation with the north African nations is indispensable, Szijjártó said. "It is not an exaggeration to say that the EU's security starts with the security and stability of north Africa," he said. As the issue is crucial, the EU "should free its financial support from all artificial political preconditions," the minister said, referring to Egypt, which halted migration over the past five years but

had no access to EU funds for "certain human rights issues". Szijjártó called for support for NGOs involved in the maritime transport of immigrants to be abandoned, saying that their actions undermined partner countries' efforts to defend their borders.

NOVÁK: HUNGARY FAMILY POLICIES GAINING INTL RECOGNITION

Hungary's demographic figures show the success of the government's family policies, which have received international recognition, Katalin Novák, the minister for families, said in London. Though Hungary's demographics are still broadly negative, important indicators are headed in the right direction, Novák told Hungarian and British reporters, noting that Hungary's fertility rate has increased to 1.56 from 1.23 since 2011, the biggest rise in the European Union. Britain, on the other hand, is seeing a decline in its fertility rate, the minister said. Meanwhile, the number of marriages in Hungary over the past decade has doubled, also the biggest increase in the EU, she said. Further, the employment of women in Hungary has increased at the second highest rate in the bloc, Novák said, adding that the mothers were active on the job market. Next year's budget, she said, allocates 6.2% of GDP to family support, as against the OECD average of 2.55%.

Novák said she had always been in favour of the EU, and still believed

that Hungary's interests were best served as a member of the bloc. She added, however, that the European Commission was gradually taking on a political role out of line with its original function, and its members were also making more and more "baseless" political statements. In such a situation, anything can happen to any member state, "and this isn't just about Hungary or Poland", Novák said. Meanwhile, she said the Hungarian government saw migration not as something that was necessary, but as a potential threat. Hungary will not interfere when it comes to any other country's support for migration, but the Hungarian government will not support it, Novák added.

BUDAPEST MAYOR SIGNS AGREEMENT ON STATE FUNDING FOR CITY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony has signed a 12 billion forint (EUR 33m) agreement on the state funding of the city's public transport system, support which he said covered 7% of the sector's total budget. Karácsony told a press conference after meeting Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics on Monday that the funding ensured the stable operation of public transport in the city. If the money is transferred this year, the city transport company will close the year without any debt, he said.

Karácsony said it was "unclear" why political pressure from the municipality

had been needed before the central funding was released. The funding is normally allocated around this time of the year, he added.

HUNGARY REGISTERS 27,830 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 460 DEATHS OVER WEEKEND

Altogether 460 patients died of a Covid-related illness during the weekend, while 27,830 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said on Monday. So far 6,120,959 people have received a first jab, while 5,839,078 have been fully vaccinated. Altogether 2,477,399 Hungarians have received a booster jab. The number of active infections stands at 185,141, while hospitals are treating 7,438 Covid-19 patients, 538 of whom need respiratory assistance. Since the first outbreak, 1,096,718 infections have been registered, while the number of fatalities has risen to 34,326. Fully 877,251 people have made a recovery. There are 52,452 people in official quarantine, while the number of tests taken stands at 8,423,435.

CABINET CHIEF: GOVT PLANS FURTHER VACCINATION DRIVES

The government is examining whether or not to declare Covid-19 immunity certificates as expired six or seven months after the date of the second vaccination, but has taken no decision yet, Antal Rogán, the

cabinet chief, said during his annual hearing in parliament's economic committee on Monday. Thanks to its vaccination drive, Hungary was the first to relaunch the country, Rogán said. "It is now a priority that as many people as possible take up a booster jab which is the only way to prevent or flatten the curve of a fifth wave of the coronavirus epidemic," he said. To help attain this goal, the government will launch further national coronavirus vaccination campaigns next month and in January, Rogán said, adding that additional "personal campaigns" were also planned in cooperation with health authorities. "A booster jab is all the more important because most people got inoculated by the end of June and these vaccines lose much of their effectiveness in preventing infection after four to six months," he said.

MEDICAL OFFICER: VACCINATION WEEK 'VERY SUCCESSFUL'

Hungary's vaccination campaign last week was hugely successful, according to the chief medical officer, so a decision has been made to extend it by one week. Fully 784,000 people were jabbed last week, with 643,000 getting a booster shot, Cecília Müller said. "This is very important," she added, noting that the virus was mutating at a mounting rate. It was especially welcome that 96,000 people opted for a first jab during the special vaccination week, she added. The

Hungarian authorities are continually monitoring the omicron variant, she said in a video on the government's social media platform on Monday. The national public health centre conducted more than 400 tests going back five days to determine whether omicron was present in Hungary, but it has not been detected, she said.

FINMIN: GROWTH TO EXCEED 5% IN 2022

Hungary's economy was one of the fastest to recover from the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, with its output surpassing the pre-pandemic level in mid-2021, and its growth expected at 6.8% this year and above 5% in 2022, Finance Minister Mihály Varga told parliament's economic committee on Monday. Unlike during the global economic crisis of 2008, Hungary needed no assistance from the International Monetary Fund, Varga said. This achievement was all the more remarkable as the global recession in 2020-2021 came to 3.6% as against 1.7% in 2008-2009, he added. Hungary, he said, had successfully managed its debt amid the hardships of the pandemic, extending debt maturity from four to six years while ramping up domestic financing, with a quarter of public debt now in Hungarian hands, up from 3% in 2010.

Referring to the September rating decision by Moody's, Varga said credit rating agencies generally had a positive view of Hungary's economy.

Also, since 2013 Hungary has made steady headway in international competitiveness rankings, he added. The government, Varga said, was committed to tax cuts as well as support for families and businesses. Tax on employment, at 35.5% in 2009, will be 13% in 2022, he said, adding that tax on small businesses will be reduced by 1 percentage point. Meanwhile, the investment rate of 27.5% is the highest in the EU, he said. In terms of health-care investment subsidies alone, the government has backed more than 80 projects worth 87 billion forints altogether, the minister added. Also, the government has multiplied spending on pensioners, and the 13-month pension will be paid in full next year, Varga said. Wages since 2010 have more than doubled and more wage hikes for teachers, armed-forces and law enforcement personnel are in the pipeline, he said. Socialist MP László Szakács, a member of the committee, said in response that the government had not taken responsibility for its "flawed economic policy". "Inflation is sky-high," he told a news conference streamed on the Democratic Coalition's Facebook, adding that the forint, meanwhile, was allowed to remain at a level that suited the government's strategic partners, multinational companies, who benefited from the weak currency. On the issue of social support, Szakács accused Varga of ignoring the fact that basic child support and the minimum old-age pension had remained static for the past 10-11 years.

KSH: JOBLESS RATE 3.9% IN OCT

Hungary's jobless rate was at 3.9% in October, edging down from 4.0% in September and 4.1% in the same month a year earlier, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The rate covers unemployment among people between the ages of 15 and 74. In absolute terms, there were 188,500 unemployed, 6,200 fewer than in September and 8,600 fewer than in the same month a year earlier.

The rolling three-month average jobless rate was 3.8% in October. KSH noted that data from the National Employment Service (NFSZ) show there were 246,000 registered jobseekers at the end of October, down 19.6% from twelve months earlier. The employment rate for the 15-74 age group reached 63.8% in October, level with the rate in September. In absolute terms, there were 4,687,800 employed, 1,200 more than in September and up 86,300 from twelve months earlier. The number of economically active people in the age group stood at 4,876,300, giving Hungary an activity rate of 66.4%.

ING Bank chief analyst Péter Virovác said the unemployment rate has been basically unchanged for six months, and the number of unemployed was broadly the same as in May or July. The small decrease in October could be attributed to some people quitting the job market, not an increase in employment, he said. ING analysts

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do not expect the fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic to cause serious problems on the labour market. By the end of the year the unemployment rate could drop to 3.8%, he said.

Takarékbank analyst András Horváth said unemployment was likely to be 4% this year and 3.3% in 2022. Steps taken by the government to preserve workplaces have substantially contributed to protecting jobs, he said. In H2 labour market conditions became similar to those in 2019, characterised by labour shortages and intense wage competition between firms.

PLANET BUDAPEST 2021 EXPO TO OPEN ON MONDAY WITH PRESIDENTS' ADDRESS

The Planet Budapest 2021 Sustainability Expo will open on Monday evening with addresses

by Hungarian President János Áder and Polish President Mateusz Morawiecki, as well as a concert, the commissioner responsible for the expo told public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió. Sustainability was a key factor in organising the event, István Joó said. Access to the Budapest fair grounds is courtesy of 40 electric buses, and rubbish is being collected by electric trucks, he said. Meanwhile, the use of paper will be minimised, and most necessary information will reach the visitors through apps, he said. About one-third of the 185 exhibitors come from the Visegrad Group (V4) countries, Joó noted. While Hungary's "strength" is in water management, Czech participants will focus on smart cities and Slovaks on energy issues, he said.

Some 4,600 students have registered to visit the expo in organised groups, Joó said. The expo offers youth programmes involving an adventure track and

featuring the "latest innovations of the 21st century," he added. The expo runs from Nov. 29 to Dec. 5.

FIRST TRAM TRAIN LINKING 5 HUNGARY CITIES STARTS OPERATION

The first tram train in Hungary, linking the cities of Hódmezővásárhely and Szeged, started operation at 4.30am on Monday. János Lázár, the region's MP and government commissioner for transport investments, said the train took 35 minutes between the two city centres, "and contributes to Hungary being one of the best places in central Europe." Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics said the next tram train is planned to connect Debrecen in east Hungary and Oradea (Nagyvárad) in Romania, "giving the investment a relevance in policy for Hungarians beyond the borders."