

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamás Vasydi

Unveiling a new Mercedes-Benz REFORM 501 LE bus

UPCOMING EVENTS

PM interview

Coronavirus updates

TOP STORY

HUNGARY-RUSSIA TIES 'BASED ON RESPECT'

Hungary views Russia as a strategically important partner in the areas of economic cooperation, energy security and the protection against the coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has said.

Attending the announcement of Russian-owned Arnest Group's first Hungarian investment on Thursday, Szijjártó said the proportion of investments from the East in the Hungarian economy was growing, vindicating the country's policy of opening to the East. The 17 billion forint (EUR 47m) aerosol filling and metal container production facility to be built in Alsózsolca by end-2024 is receiving a 7 billion forint state grant and training subsidies, and the investment will create 256 jobs.

Agreement on the development project went ahead despite sanctions against Russia and in the face of criticism of pragmatic bilateral cooperation, he said. Several international players wanted to prevent cooperation, but, he added, the Hungarian government had a vested interest in partnership based on mutual respect from which both sides profited equally. He accused western European countries of aiming for the same cooperation while resorting to hostile remarks, "driven by political correctness", and signing "huge business deals" in or with Russia.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ DECRIES HYPOCRISY OF OTHER EU MEMBERS

Since the introduction of European Union restrictions in 2015, trade between EU member states and Russia increased by 16%, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, noting that German exports rose by 21% and French exports by 44%. Had the government not pursued foreign policies based on national interests and instead yielded to pressure, Hungary would have been much less successful in the fight against the pandemic, in guaranteeing energy security, and achieving economic success, he said. Hungary-Russia trade increased by 51% last year and Hungarian exports rose by 15%, exceeding 2 billion dollars, he added.

The production value of the Hungarian chemical industry increased by 41% last year, reaching 7,000 billion forints, and the sector currently employs almost 95,000 people, he added.

FIDESZ MEP: ‘EU LEFTISTS, SOROS NETWORK’ INTERFERING WITH HUNGARY ELECTION

Pro-migration, left-wing European Union politicians and the “Soros network” are interfering with the upcoming Hungarian election, Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi said in response to a letter of 62 MEPs calling on the

OSCE to carry out a full-scale election observation in Hungary. Hidvéghi said the letter’s signatories were “well-known members of the Soros network” such as the Helsinki Committee and Amnesty International, and “pro-migration MEPs who have been serving them for years”. The author of the letter, Daniel Freund of the Greens, used to work for Transparency International, and “continues to lobby for punitive measures against Hungary” as an MEP. “We find among the signatories Katharina Baley [S&D], infamous for calling for the starving out of Hungary and Poland unless they dance to Brussels’ tune. So is Greens party member Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, a member of the LIBE committee, currently at work at another mendacious report on Hungary.” Hidvéghi said those MEPs had been attacking Hungary “for years because we don’t allow migrants into the country and we protect our children from LGBTQ propaganda.” The Fidesz MEP also slammed Hungarian Democratic Coalition (DK) and Momentum Movement MEPs who signed the letter, insisting that the Hungarian left wing was “in a state of panic ... trying to justify an election defeat in advance.” Hidvéghi said the European Left wanted to see the Hungarian leftist alliance of DK head Ferenc Gyurcsány and the joint opposition’s prime ministerial candidate, Péter Márki-Zay, in power.

Hidvéghi said the letter was the first step in an open intervention in the Hungarian election. “The letter itself

is nothing but empty provocation ... any observer group is free to enter Hungary. They will see with their own eyes that the Hungarian election is free and democratic, as were those of previous years.” “We will not cave in to pressure. As long as the Fidesz-Christian Democrats [KDNP] lead Hungary, they will protect the country from migrants and our children from LGBTQ propaganda,” he added.

Justice Minister Judit Varga said on Facebook that the letter’s signatories were “urging interference in Hungary’s election”. She said the letter was “full of falsehoods and base criticism of Hungary”, but the authors “seem to forget that OSCE has routinely sent observers to Hungary in the past”. She added that the observers “will witness another free and democratic election”.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: UN COUNTER-TERRORISM OFFICE IN BUDAPEST TO HAVE FURTHER TASKS

The United Nations counterterrorism centre’s regional office in Budapest will assume further responsibilities, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in New York after meeting Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General for the Counter-Terrorism Office. Szijjártó said on Facebook that the Budapest office would be assigned “more and more functions” including a programme implemented in cooperation with the Balkans to thwart terrorism financing, setting up a counterterrorism academy and

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offering training in air traffic security. More and more UN counterterrorism activities will be coordinated from Budapest.

Szijjártó said he was scheduled to meet UN Secretary General António Guterres, adding that he did not see eye to eye with the UN's chief regarding several matters, but "there are issues over which cooperation is close". With a view to recent financial, migration, and health crises Szijjártó called for a "much more effective" political cooperation, adding that "when it comes to human lives, the disputes should not be determined by political ideologies". He added that "the role of the UN should be enhanced", and he offered Hungary's support.

COE: HUNGARY FULLY ADOPTED WARSAW CONVENTION ARTICLE ON CORPORATE MONEY LAUNDERING

Hungary is one of 17 states to have fully adopted the 10th article of the Warsaw Convention, outlining penalties of legal entities guilty of money laundering, the Council of Europe (CoE) said in its report on the implementation of the Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism. Member states that implement the convention have pledged to enshrine penalties of legal entities guilty of money

laundering into law. The punishment should be proportionate, effective and have the effect of a deterrent, the report said. Hungary has complied with the convention in that respect, the report said, adding that the country should further develop case law in this area. Besides Hungary, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia and Sweden also adopted the 10th article, the report said.

HUNGARY RECORDS 15,526 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 71 DEATHS

Altogether 71 patients died of a Covid-related illness over the 24 hours to Thursday morning, while 15,526 new coronavirus infections were registered, koronavirus.gov.hu said. So far 6,325,143 people have received a first jab, while 6,069,677 have been double-jabbed. Fully 3,437,335 Hungarians have received a booster shot. The website said the omicron variant was spreading rapidly, accounting for 87% of all infections. The number of active infections has risen to 158,424, while hospitals are treating 2,673 Covid-19 patients, 202 of whom are intubated on a ventilator. Since the first outbreak, 1,385,500 have been registered with the virus, while 40,757 deaths have been recorded. Fully 1,186,319 people have made a recovery.

GOVT CONCLUDES STRATEGIC AGREEMENT WITH AUTOLIV

Hungary's government has concluded a strategic cooperation agreement with Autoliv, the world's largest automotive safety supplier, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Thursday. The agreement will help maintain the rate of economic growth and strengthen the position of Hungarian suppliers, he said. Stockholm-based Autoliv is the 91st corporation to sign a strategic cooperation agreement with the government. These companies, taken together, employ 193,000 Hungarian workers, 15,000 more than they did when they signed the agreement, Szijjártó said. Autoliv manufactures active and passive automotive security systems and accessories. In 2020 it had a share of 42% in the global production of airbags, 44% in safety belts and 37% in steering wheels. It is a supplier of all major car manufacturers of the world, and operates 64 plants in 27 countries. Szijjártó said Hungarian-Swedish trade turnover increased by 18% last year, and Swedish investment in Hungary came close to 800 million euros.

ASSOCIATION: HUNGARY DRINKING WATER QUALITY IN LINE WITH EU RULES

The quality of drinking water in Hungary is "comfortably" in line with European Union regulations, the

Hungarian Water Utility Association (MaVíz) has said. In the statement issued in response to an EU decision to monitor the levels of two substances impacting the human endocrine system in Hungarian drinking water, MaVíz said the review was not a response to irregularities in water samples. The level of beta-estradiol and nonylphenol have to be monitored on a regular basis to enable water providers to act swiftly in case of growing trace quantities, the authority said. In line with the decision and Hungarian regulations, water providers check water quality daily in Hungary, the statement said.

HUNGARY SEES 307 TRANSPLANTS LAST YEAR

Overall, 307 transplants were performed in Hungary last year, the National Blood Supply Service (OVSZ) said on Friday.

A total of 273 organs were removed from brain-dead patients and 34 were removed from living organ donors, it said. Altogether 196 kidney transplants were conducted in four Hungarian hospital centres dedicated to transplants, most of them in Budapest's Semmelweis University. Hungary's two heart transplant centres performed 34 operations, of which 24 were carried out at the Semmelweis University's Heart and Vascular Centre and ten at the Gottsegen György National Cardiology Institute. Liver transplants numbered 59, and lung transplants 14. Twenty-six percent

of the transplanted organs were provided by foreign donors. Altogether 1,313 patients were waiting for organ transplants at the end of last year, OVSZ said.

EC: HUNGARY BROKE MERGER RULES BY VETOING VIG'S PLANNED TAKEOVER OF AEGON'S LOCAL BUSINESS

Hungary breached European Union merger rules by vetoing Vienna Insurance Group's (VIG) planned takeover of Dutch insurer Aegon's local business, the European Commission said on Thursday, outlining its "preliminary position". VIG announced in November 2020 that it agreed to acquire the businesses of Aegon in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Turkey for 830 million euros, a deal that would have made VIG the market leader in Hungary. The Interior Ministry rejected the planned takeover in April 2021, according to VIG. The government can block foreign takeovers of domestic companies under special powers granted to it by parliament.

The EC member states may only take measures "to protect legitimate interests provided that such measures are compatible with the general principles and other provisions of EU law, and are communicated to the Commission except for limited instances," the EC said in its statement. It added that there were "reasonable doubts as to the measure being aimed to protect Hungary's legitimate

interests" and that Hungary's "reasoning is insufficient". The veto "should have been communicated to, and approved by, the Commission before Hungary implemented it," EC said. Hungary has ten working days to respond to the EC's preliminary assessment, and further action may result in an infringement assessment and an order to withdraw the veto, the statement added.

BMW PRODUCTION IN HUNGARY TO START IN 2025

German car maker BMW will start production at a plant in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, in 2025, the company announced at a press conference on annual sales in Budapest. Work on the base is "proceeding according to plan" and building construction will start in the first half of 2022. The more than 1 billion euro plant, with 1,000 workers, will have capacity to turn out 150,000 cars a year when production starts in 2025. BMW was to have started construction of the plant in the spring of 2020, but management revisited plans for the base because of the impact of the coronavirus crisis.

BMW Group Magyarország managing director Maciej Galant said BMW brand sales in Hungary rose 16% to 4,063 last year. Sales of the MINI brand increased 25% to 457. BMW had a 3.3% share of the new passenger car market, but a 29.5% share in the premium category. Next year, BMW's share of the premium segment could

reach 30%, Galant said. There are 15 BMW and six MINI brand dealerships in Hungary.

HUNGARIAN CONSORTIUM DEVELOPS EARLY CANCER DETECTION SYSTEM

A consortium of Hungarian companies and institutions has developed a prototype that could be used for the early detection of cancerous tumours. The system could allow malignant tumours to be detected and monitored with a minimally invasive procedure, the consortium Enterprise Communications Magyarország said. Enterprise Communications was joined by the University of Szeged, the Szeged Biological Research Centre, Delta Bio 2000 and Hiperon Genetics in the four-year project supported by close to 1.5 billion forints in European Union and state grant money.

KÚRIA OVERTURNS RULING ON ESTERHÁZY TREASURE CLAIM

The Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, has overturned court rulings which rejected the Esterházy Foundation's claim on a collection of precious antiques, the foundation has said, welcoming the decision instructing the secondary court in Budapest

to reconsider the case, and noting at the same time that it was ready to pursue a private settlement with the Hungarian state. The Kúria called the secondary ruling "incomplete, unjustified and illogical". If restored to its former owners, the collection would remain in Hungary, the foundation said, adding that they were seeking a "comprehensive agreement" with the Hungarian state, possibly involving the establishment of an Esterházy Art Centre in Budapest. The foundation has sought repossession of the collection since 2017, claiming that it was an integral part of the family's collections in Austria's Forchtenstein Castle, and that the 270 pieces of silver, coins and tapestries brought to Hungary in 1919 were illegitimately collectivised in 1949.

GERMAN YOUTH ACTIVIST HONOURED IN HUNGARY

Maren Schoening, founding leader of the German-Hungarian Youth Association, has been awarded the Hungarian Order of Merit, Knight's Cross, in recognition of her merits in promoting close relations between the two countries. The honour was presented to her by Gergely Gulyás, the prime minister's chief of staff, in Budapest on Thursday. Addressing the ceremony, Gulyás said Hungarians

always highly appreciated foreigners who sought to obtain first-hand information about the country. The minister praised the association as one that fulfilled a vital need and as a true symbol of friendship.

The German-Hungarian Youth Association promotes ties between children, young adults and youth-policy officials by organising professional and scholarship programs, the prime minister's office noted.

KENDE GASTRO OPENS BISTRO SHOWCASING AIFI CHECKOUT-FREE PLATFORM IN BUDAPEST

Family-owned Kende Gastro has opened a bistro in the Agora Budapest office building that uses an autonomous, checkout-free platform developed by US startup AiFi. Kende Gastro has signed an exclusive cooperation agreement for Hungary with AiFi, company head Gábor Kende told MTI. The technology was developed by Amazon in 2018, he added. AiFi's platform tracks the items shoppers add to their "virtual baskets" using cameras and charges them using a mobile application, he said. Such a system can be installed in a 20sqm, turnkey store for about 40 million forints (EUR 110,000), he added.