

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Flowers in downtown Debrecen

MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

## UPCOMING EVENTS

War in Ukraine

Coronavirus updates

## TOP STORY

# PRESIDENT ASKS ORBÁN TO FORM NEW GOVT

President János Áder has asked Viktor Orbán, the incumbent prime minister and leader of the election-winning Fidesz party, to set up Hungary's next government.

Orbán was nominated for the post by the Fidesz-Christian Democrat party alliance. Áder confirmed that Orbán had accepted his request and added he would make a formal proposal to parliament on Monday. Áder said the recent election was "the first of its kind in various ways" among the nine democratic elections held since 1989. For the first time, two multi-party formations were competing – the Fidesz-led alliance and the opposition coalition -- and the number of national lists was at a record so low, he said, adding that April 3 had seen the highest number of foreign observers and the fewest complaints received. "The results of the election, and the decision voters made are clear: the election was lawful, constitutional, free and democratic," the president said. "The legitimacy of the new parliament and the next government cannot be questioned," he added. In a press statement made in the presence of the president, Orbán said that "a decade of perils" lay ahead of Hungary: "There is war, prices are rising in Europe, and signs of a serious energy crisis are apparent."

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**ORBÁN PLEDGES TO PROTECT HUNGARY FROM DANGERS**

Following President János Áder’s announcement that he had asked incumbent premier Viktor Orbán to form Hungary’s next government, the prime minister pledged that the members of his new government would “protect Hungary from the dangers of the next decade...” Orbán said “suffering” lay ahead of Europe’s economies and added that the coronavirus pandemic was not over. On April 3, Hungarian voters “made a clear decision showing that they expect the country’s leaders to protect them against those hardships”. “We must stay out of the war and address challenges of an emerging European economic crisis in a way that Hungary can retain its achievements,” he said. Orbán added that the incumbent government’s recent measures, such as extending caps on the prices of fuels and food, as well as rising pensions, had been designed to that end.

Orbán declined to disclose details about his preparations for the new government, but said negotiations were under way with ministerial candidates, adding that the selection of ministers was determined by “an understanding of the tasks for the next four years”. He said his negotiations were aimed at finding candidates for the full four years because “life quickly changes and Hungary needs a government which can provide the best answers to topical challenges”.

**SZIJJÁRTÓ: APRIL 3 ELECTION ‘HISTORIC’**

Hungary held a “historic” election on April 3, and “when we decide about the future for the whole nation, each member should be given the opportunity to participate in the process,” Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Lendava (Lendva), in north-eastern Slovenia. In a joint press conference with local ethnic Hungarian leader Ferenc Horváth, Szijjártó said the outcome of the vote “held at a time of war” had been crucial not only for Hungarians living in the country but for the entire nation. Hungarians beyond the borders cast a record 318,000 mail-in votes at the election, he said. In Međimurje, the north-eastern Slovenian region with an ethnic Hungarian community, the number of votes grew by 40% from the last election to 168, he said.

He said Hungary planned to continue its regional development programme, which has so far granted a total of 2.5 billion forints (EUR 6.6m) to 651 entrepreneurs in the region, supporting investments worth 3.7 billion forints. A Hungarian-Slovenian regional development fund, which the heads of government signed earlier this year, will start operating in May. Within that framework, Hungary will pay a further 5 million euros to support the region, he said. Meanwhile, economic cooperation between the two countries jumped by 14% last year, to nearly 3 billion euros, he said.

Szijjártó congratulated Horváth, who won a preferential minority seat in the Slovenian parliament at Sunday’s election. Horváth thanked Hungary for its support during the coronavirus pandemic and in preserving the culture of Međimurje Hungarians.

Regarding Hungary’s decision to pay in roubles for Russian gas following EU sanctions due to the Ukraine-Russia war, Szijjártó slammed the “international mainstream media”, which, he said, had reported the issue “with gross and shocking distortion.” The majority of western European companies importing gas to the EU pay for Russian natural gas according to the requests of the Russian state and the supplier, he said. Companies importing natural gas from Russia are opening accounts at Gazprom Bank, which is not subject to the sanctions, he said. On the company’s instructions, Gazprom Bank converts their euros to roubles and pays for the gas, he said. “It is not true that others have rejected this; they are just less open about it,” he said, calling on the media to stop casting the transaction as if Hungary had violated a joint European stance by agreeing to it. “We can have a political discussion about needing other energy resources and about the importance of independence from Russian natural gas, but we cannot buy gas on an ideological or philosophical basis; it’s a physical process,” he said. Ensuring Hungary’s energy security is a priority for the government, and Hungary is dependent on Russia for “physical, geographical and infrastructural



reasons", he said. "If we could import from elsewhere, we would do so, but that would require discovering new gas fields and building new pipelines," he said. "We cannot heat flats with political statements," he added.

### **FIDESZ MEP: EC RULE-OF-LAW MECHANISM AGAINST HUNGARY 'PUNISHMENT AND PRESSURE'**

The European Commission's decision to activate the rule-of-law mechanism against Hungary serves to put pressure on and penalise its government for "daring to envision a conservative nation in Europe," Andor Deli, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, said. Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for Budget and Administration, sent a notification letter to Hungary on Wednesday, activating the mechanism linking European Union funding to the rule of law. Vice-President Vera Jourová said in a tweet that the Commission had "identified issues that might be breaching [the rule of law] in HU and affect the EU budget." Deli told Hungarian journalists in Brussels that the mechanism "is difficult to understand from a legal or practical point of view". European Union institutions "are talking about taking away money Hungary has yet to receive," he said. Weakening Hungary would enfeeble the EU itself, which draws its strength from that of its member states, Deli said. Undermining Hungary also undermines European unity, he added. The European Parliament's Committee Economic

and Monetary Affairs on Thursday held a closed meeting with the Committee on Budgets and EC members to discuss implementation of the decree on the rule-of-law conditionality. In his address, Deli said the mechanism had been activated because "even in this situation riddled with economic difficulties and war, there are some who want to weaken the strength and unity of Europe."

The fact that the funds being withdrawn from Hungary are yet to be paid "illustrates the absurdity of the whole procedure," Deli said. At the same time, the Hungarian government remains open to further talks in the hope of finding solutions to the EU's concerns, he said.

### **KARÁCSONY: BUDAPEST TO RECEIVE DIRECT EU FUNDING FOR GREEN DEVELOPMENT**

The European Commission is directly funding green developments in Budapest, as part of a mission to help achieve the 2030 climate goals in one hundred cities in Europe, Gergely Karácsony, the city's mayor, said. The European Union's Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities mission is also supporting Miskolc in northern Hungary and Pécs in the south, he said in a Facebook post. The mission's aim is to help European cities achieve their climate goals by 2030 and become "experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow suit by 2050", the mission's website

said. The 360 million euro programme allows a great degree of independence to cities, and Budapest will have to draft a "climate city agreement", detailing all concepts for sectors of city management to achieve climate neutrality, Karácsony said. "Budapest has received a great opportunity we must take. We will do everything in our power, and ask for the government's support and cooperation," he said.

### **DK CALLS ON EP PEGASUS COMMITTEE TO HEAR JUSTICE MINISTER**

The opposition Democratic Coalition has proposed that Justice Minister Judit Varga be interviewed by the European Parliament's Pegasus committee. DK MEP Sándor Rónai told an online press briefing that the committee was in charge of investigating abuse of the spy software in Europe. In recent months, members of the Orbán government have made contradictory statements, and the committee should hear Varga as the "number one government official in charge of the issue", he said. Her direct subordinates have signed the instructions for "illegal monitoring", and Varga has not given a clear explanation for months, he added.

### **POLICE: OVER 12,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON THURSDAY**

Fully 5,999 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on

Thursday, while another 6,221 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 758 people, the police website said on Friday. Holders of such permits must contact a local immigration office near their place of residence within thirty days to apply for permanent documents, it said. Budapest police received 344 refugees, 187 children among them, by train, according to the municipal police website.

### **HUNGARY RECORDS 1,384 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 12 DEATHS**

Altogether 12 patients died of a Covid-related illness over the past 24 hours, while 1,384 new coronavirus infections were registered, [koronavirus.gov.hu](http://koronavirus.gov.hu) said on Friday. So far 6,406,501 people have received a first jab, while 6,192,643 have been double-jabbed. Fully 3,863,124 Hungarians have received a booster third shot and 287,080 a fourth shot.

The number of active infections dropped further, to 50,521, while hospitals are treating 1,427 Covid-19 patients, 41 of whom are intubated on a ventilator. Since the first outbreak, 1,901,017 have been registered with the virus, while 46,201 deaths have been recorded. Fully 1,804,295 people have made a recovery.

### **HUNGARY UPGRADES RADIATION MONITORING SYSTEM**

The National Directorate General for Disaster Management (OKF) on Friday announced the completion of an upgrade of Hungary's radiation monitoring system. OKF added 30 next-generation monitoring stations and upgraded 26 existing ones, bringing the total number to 160. It also acquired four mobile radiation monitoring stations and consolidated public warning systems on a common platform. The project was supported by 4.8 billion forints (EUR 13m) in European Union funding.

### **DEATHS OUTPACE BIRTHS IN MARCH**

Preliminary data show that 6,970 children were born and 11,746 people died in March 2022 with the number of live births increasing by 2.2% compared with April last year, while deaths decreased by 0.9%, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. As the number of deaths was lower than last year and births increased slightly, a 12% decrease in the natural population loss was registered, with a loss of 4,776 in March 2022 as against 10,147 in March 2021. In March 2022, 4,541 couples tied the knot, up 12% from 593 in March 2021. In the past 12 months, 90,371 children were born, down 2.2% from the same period of last year, while 148,574 people died, 0.9% fewer people than in the previous year. The natural population loss came to 58,203 compared with 57,570 in the same period of last year, an increase of 1.1%. Between April 2021 and March 2022, 70,292 couples were married, 5.2% more than the previous year.