

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVA/Attila Kovács

Hungary sends medical aid worth HUF 210 m to Ukraine

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office releases March retail figures

War in Ukraine

NBH presser on Green Finance Report

European Parliament holds plenary session

TOP STORY

FORMIN: RUSSIAN ENERGY CRITICAL FOR HUNGARY

Hungary will withhold its approval of any sanctions that would render the transit of Russian oil and natural gas to the country unfeasible, as this would compromise its energy security, the foreign minister has said.

Whereas Hungary has so far voted for all European Union sanction packages, it has had to contend with “unfair and unjust” attacks, the foreign ministry cited Péter Szijjártó as saying. He said Hungary was open and straightforward about its unwillingness to abandon its energy supply security, adding that the government protected the national interest first and foremost. “This is a real issue of energy security as it’s currently physically impossible to run the economy without Russian crude,” Szijjártó said. Around 20,000 tonnes each day, or 65% of Hungarian oil consumption, comes from Russia through the Friendship Pipeline, he said, adding that no alternative supply routes were available for replacing this amount. The Croatian section of the Adriatic pipeline has major capacity limitations, Szijjártó said, while developing the necessary infrastructure would require enormous investment. With circumstances thrust upon it, Hungary, he said, had no time to alter its refinery to make the switch to another type of crude, and it did not yet know exactly how much this would cost.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY BACKS DIVERSIFICATION OF EUROPEAN ENERGY SUPPLY

Hungary supports the diversification of European energy supply, and has made headway in this direction by increasing oil imports from Kazakhstan, which now cover 16% of its total consumption, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in a joint press conference with Kazakh counterpart Mukhtar Tileuberdi. Still, this is supplied via Russia and could be subject to sanctions, the foreign ministry cited Szijjártó as saying. Meanwhile, he said oil and gas company MOL was the technical manager of a Kazakh-Chinese-Hungarian consortium that plans extraction from a big gas field in Kazakhstan pending Kazakh government approval. Extraction could start next year, he added. Szijjártó praised Kazakhstan for combatting terrorism and ensuring stability in the region neighbouring Afghanistan by preventing the spread of extremist ideologies and by taking action against migration and smuggling.

KOVÁCS: HUNGARY CANNOT REPLACE RUSSIAN ENERGY IN SHORT TERM

Hungary cannot find alternative energy supplies to replace Russian imports in the short term, Zoltán Kovács, state secretary for international

communications and relations, told the BBC on Monday evening. Kovács said in his interview that any of the current proposals aimed at banning Russian imports would bring the Hungarian economy to a halt and render the everyday lives of Hungarians untenable. Kovács noted that 65% of Hungary's oil supplies and 85% of its gas came through pipelines from Russia. Hungary is "tied to Russia" by those pipelines, he said, adding that the country would not be able to secure alternatives in the next 3-5 years. Asked if the Hungarian government was eyeing some form of preferential treatment within the European Union should the bloc impose a ban on Russian oil, Kovács said the government had not seen the final plans, but added that the government's position against any such embargo had not changed. Put to him that Hungary's position could impact the EU's uniform stance against the war in Ukraine, Kovács said a reasonable compromise must be reached which is acceptable to all parties, based on a pragmatic approach. The economy cannot be fuelled, vehicles driven, or homes heated by ideology, he insisted.

MINISTRY OFFICIAL: ENERGY SUPPLY TOP HUNGARIAN PRIORITY

When it comes to drawing up EU sanctions against Russia, Hungary attaches prime importance to the security of its energy supply,

a ministry of innovation and technology official said after attending an extraordinary meeting of the Energy Council in Brussels on Monday. Attila Steiner said Russia's decision to cut off gas to Poland and Bulgaria would not affect Hungary's own supply, and the country was receiving Russian gas in accordance with its contract. Gas is flowing through Bulgaria to Hungary, he noted, adding that this was crucially important to guarantee its supply. Steiner told members of the Energy Council that Hungary has made big investments in its gas network over the past few years, building cross-border interconnectors. But other member states and third countries are needed to secure necessary gas resources, he said. He also noted that Hungary's gas storage capacities are among the largest in the region. Meanwhile, Hungary's supply of crude oil is continuous, he said. Hungary's domestic refineries are geared towards Russian crude, so these supplies must be maintained, he said. Whereas countries in the region have invested heavily in alternative sources in recent years, dependence on Russian energy is still high, he said, adding that it would be a matter of years before investments yielded alternative sources of energy. Press reports indicate that Hungary and Slovakia may be excluded from the EU oil embargo in view of their special situation, but Hungary has not yet received a related proposal in writing, Steiner added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, KYRGYZSTAN READY TO BOOST COOPERATION

Hungary and Kyrgyzstan have recently lifted their cooperation to a strategic partnership and have taken the decisions needed to further advance their relations, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Bishkek on Tuesday. Central Asia is one of the world’s fastest growing regions and will continue to be a key destination when it comes to Hungary’s foreign trade aspirations, Szijjártó said in a joint press briefing with his Kyrgyz counterpart Jeenbek Kulubayev, according to a foreign ministry statement.

The Hungarian-Kyrgyz development fund recently began operations, Szijjártó said, adding that the Hungarian government had contributed five billion forints (EUR 13.2m) to it with a view to supporting investments by Hungarian companies in Kyrgyzstan. Preparations on the first projects are under way, with Hungary and Kyrgyzstan engaged in advanced talks on the construction of hydropower plants, the delivery of live animals, the export of ATMs and the construction of irrigation and sewage systems, Szijjártó said. The foundations for such investments are solid, Szijjártó said, noting that bilateral trade turnover last year increased by 47%, exceeding 12 million dollars.

As regards the war in Ukraine, Szijjártó said the conflict was also affecting Hungarian-Kyrgyz relations, noting that a direct air link between Budapest

and Bishkek had yet to be established due to the crisis. Szijjártó underlined the importance of preventing security threats in Central Asia, preventing Afghanistan from becoming a source of migration waves, waging a successful fight against terrorism and putting a stop to the spread of extremist ideologies. Szijjártó urged greater European Union support for Kyrgyzstan’s efforts in this area and called on the bloc to sign a cooperation agreement with Kyrgyzstan as soon as possible. He said the EU should also double its financial support for the border protection efforts of Central Asian countries.

Kulubayev noted that Kyrgyzstan and Hungary mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties in 2022. The two countries have come a long way since 1992, he said, stressing the importance of boosting cooperation in several areas. At the second meeting of the Hungarian-Kyrgyz Strategic Council, the parties signed a cultural cooperation agreement and agreed on the schedule of bilateral cooperation for 2022-2025. Earlier in the day, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov decorated Szijjártó with the Order of Friendship in recognition of his efforts to advance bilateral relations.

EC IDENTIFIES ‘SERIOUS RISK’ FOR SOUND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF EU BUDGET IN HUNGARY

The European Commission has identified issues in Hungary that

indicate sound management of European Union monies are at risk, European Union Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders said in a European Parliament debate in Strasbourg on Tuesday. “I very much regret ... that I am not in a position today to be able to report back to you about positive trends when it comes to the rule of law in Poland and Hungary,” Reynders said in the debate on the ongoing hearings under the EU’s Article 7 procedure regarding the two countries. The EC does not hesitate to use the tools at its disposal to protect the bloc’s fundamental values and financial interests and will not delay in initiating proceedings if the rule of law is under threat, the commissioner said. Reynders noted that the EC last week activated against Hungary the mechanism linking EU funding to the rule of law. He said the rule-of-law issues identified by the EC “affect or seriously risk affecting” the sound management of the EU budget and the EU’s financial interests.

Addressing the debate, Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi said the accusations levelled at Hungary were “not factual, they are not of a legal nature, but clearly are only political”. The left-liberal forces “propagating the new religion, multiculturalism and open society à la [US financier] George Soros” do not like Hungarian policies that allow the country to decide freely on matters that do not fall under EU competency, Hidvéghi said. They criticise Hungary because it distinguishes between refugees



and economic immigrants, defines marriage as the union of a man and woman and asserts that the father is a man and the mother a woman, he said.

Hidvéghi said Hungary more recently had “come under attack” over its decision to protect children and its stance that parents should have the exclusive right to decide on the sex education of their children. Those who claim press freedom is lacking in Hungary do not like that “unlike in western Europe, in Hungary, right-wing, conservative, Christian Democratic media exists and flourishes”, he said. All of Hungary benefits from the country’s economic growth, otherwise the government would not keep getting re-elected with such a large majority, the MEP said. Hidvéghi said Brussels had become a “self-righteous postmodern witch hunt club” which used sanctions as blackmail and wanted to “impose a radical and narrow ideology on everyone else”. It is time to stop the attacks against Hungary and respect Hungarians’ right to decide on matters concerning their country, he said.

MI HAZÁNK PROPOSES SCRAPPING MPS’ IMMUNITY

The radical Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) party is proposing scrapping lawmakers’ immunity with a view to curbing “politicians’ crimes”, Előd Novák, the party’s deputy leader, said on Tuesday. Scrapping the “outdated

privilege of politicians” would require amending the Constitution, Novák said. The law “entitles politicians to act irresponsibly”, and violates the principle of equality before the law, he said. Meanwhile, members of the party group also signed a proposal to end the “nearly perpetual state of emergency”, originally imposed in response to the coronavirus pandemic, Novák said, adding that low infection numbers justified abolishing that measure. Novák said the government’s intention to maintain the special legal order in view of the “American-Russian war in Ukraine” was “unacceptable”. He said Mi Hazánk lawmakers would not support amending the Constitution to enable such a step, and the government should withdraw the decree allowing foreign military units into the country, he added.

MICHAEL WALLACE BANACH APPOINTED HUNGARY’S APOSTOLIC NUNCIO

Pope Francis has appointed Michael Wallace Banach, the titular archbishop of Memphis, US, as the apostolic nuncio of Hungary, the Hungarian Bishops’ conference said on Tuesday. Banach was born in Worcester, Mass., in 1962, and ordained as a priest in 1988. He has been working as a diplomat for the Holy See since 1994, and served as an observer at the UN, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organisation for Security

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and other institutions. He was appointed titular archbishop of Memphis in 2013. He has carried out duties as an apostolic nuncio in the Solomon Islands, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and other countries.

GOVT SENDS MEDICAL AID WORTH HUF 210 M TO UKRAINE

The government is sending medical aid worth 210 million forints (EUR 570,000) under the arrangements of the Hungary Helps humanitarian scheme to Transcarpathia, a state secretary of the human resources ministry said on Tuesday. Bence Rétvári said at the national hospital directorate’s warehouse in Pilisvörösvár near Budapest that the aid shipment to leave for Ukraine on Wednesday morning includes 30 pallets of drugs, medical equipment, infusion pumps, first aid boxes and bandages. During the time of war, hospitals find it difficult to get new supplies, which makes the Hungarian aid especially important, he said. Tristan Azbej, state secretary in charge of helping persecuted Christians and the implementation of the Hungary Helps scheme, said that in addition to 2 billion forints support provided so far by the government, 500 million forints worth of aid will be sent to Transcarpathia and Ukraine. The medical aid to be sent on Wednesday represents a part of this and the rest will be paid in the form of support for charity schemes in Transcarpathia and Ukraine, he added.

POLICE: OVER 10,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON MONDAY

Fully 4,664 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Monday, while another 5,510 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 504 people, the police website said on Tuesday. Holders of such permits must contact a local immigration office near their place of residence within thirty days to apply for permanent documents, it added. Budapest police received 466 refugees, 232 children among them, by train, according to the municipal police website.

PALKOVICS ATTENDS BBS LIBRARY CONSTRUCTION CEREMONY

Innovation and Technology Minister László Palkovics on Tuesday attended a ceremony marking the completion of the main structure of a new library and students'

centre for the Budapest Business School complex. In his address, the minister said BBS was "a beneficiary of Hungary's higher education reform" as one of 21 universities transferred to foundations in the past two years. A new management model for these universities means "not only simpler operations but a different financing model", he said, adding that funding for BBS had quadrupled under the new system. Thanks to developments in recent years, more and more Hungarian universities have been ranked among the top 1,000 universities of the world, Palkovics said. Spending on higher education in 2022 will amount to 2% of Hungarian GDP. Meanwhile, the amount available for university development projects will total 2,700 billion forints (EUR 7.1bn), the minister said.

KARIKÓ AMONG NEW MEMBERS OF ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Hungarian-born biochemist Katalin Karikó was elected an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy

of Sciences at a closed session of the organisation's general meeting on Monday. The Academy Assembly elected new full, corresponding, external and honorary members to the Academy. A total of 100 new members were elected from a list of 110 candidates, including 13 women. Karikó, the vice president of BioNTech, which has led research on mRNA-based medicine since the 1990s, has played a major role in developing new vaccination strategies which have been used in the fight against Covid-19.

POLICE UNIT DEPLOYED TO NORTH MACEDONIA

The Hungarian police have deployed a 29-strong unit to North Macedonia on Tuesday, to aid border protection efforts in the country, the police's official website, police.hu, said. The unit will work under the command of local law enforcement, patrolling the border to prevent and investigate illegal entries, and to arrest people smugglers and illegal migrants, police.hu said. The Hungarian officers will use their own equipment, police.hu said.