

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Woman who has fled Ukraine chooses clothes with her daughter in Budapest donation centre

MTI/Szilárd Kosztrésák

UPCOMING EVENTS

War in Ukraine

Mi Hazánk deputy leader's presser

Stats office publishes March industry prices in 1st reading

Sziget Festival 2022 presser

Giro d'Italia Budapest-Visegrad round

TOP STORY

PAKS 'ECONOMIC, SECURITY INTEREST'

Completion of the upgrade of Hungary's Paks nuclear plant is in Hungary's economic and security interest, Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Alexey Likhachev, the head of Russia's Rosatom.

At the talks in Istanbul, Rosatom leaders "assured the Hungarian side that in terms of technology they are able to complete the project", the foreign minister told MTI. The Hungarian atomic energy authority is in the process of reviewing permit applications, and once those permits are issued, "construction may enter its next phase", Szijjártó said. The project to add two new blocks to the plant will make Hungary's energy supply "more secure and more predictable", he said. Global energy markets, he noted, face "appalling challenges". "Countries like Hungary which fundamentally rely on imported energy will be especially impacted by those difficulties". It is in Hungary's interest to increase its energy production, which requires increased capacities, he said. Nuclear energy offers the greatest potential to achieve that goal, he added. Nuclear energy is "cheap, safe and environmentally friendly", and could be instrumental for Hungary to "retain the achievements of the utility cuts programme and meet environmental protection goals", he said.

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KOVÁCS: BRUSSELS PROPOSAL BAD FOR HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ENERGY SECURITY

A proposal by Brussels to ban oil imports from Russia by the end of next year is bad for Hungarian national energy security, Zoltán Kovács, state secretary for international communications and relations, told CNN. Kovács said Hungary received 65% of crude oil supplies and 85% of natural gas from Russia. "We inherited a one-sided dependence on Russia after the fall of communism," he said, adding that the government has been trying in the past twelve years to increase the diversity of energy supplies. Hungary will not be able to find an alternative source to replace Russian energy under the short deadline proposed by the EU, he added. Calculations show that such a changeover would take at least 3-5 years, he said. "We haven't received much assistance [by the European Union] so far, beyond the energy terminal in Croatia. So simply neither resources nor capacity, nor alternative resources, are available for Hungary for the moment and for the foreseeable future," he said. In response to a question, Kovács denied reports that Hungary had been pre-warned by Russia of the invasion of Ukraine. Hungary has "received information and intelligence with the same pace and the same time as other NATO allies", he added.

Meanwhile, Kovács told the BBC that a proposal by the European Commission to phase in sanctions on Russian oil was "unacceptable". Asked whether Hungary would veto the proposal, Kovács said: "Shortly, yes". He said it would take 3-4 years and around half a billion euros of investment for Hungary's oil industry to adapt to a shift in supply of crude. Kovács stressed that the sanctions proposal regarding Russian oil came from "the administrative and bureaucratic centre" of the European Union rather than from member states. "It is proposing something that is unacceptable. They exactly know the Hungarian position. They are familiar with the facts, they are familiar with the ratios of Russian gas and oil in our energy portfolio and the importance for our economic system. So they exactly know that what they are proposing is against Hungarian interests," he said. The proposal would "ruin the Hungarian economy", he added.

HUNGARY OFFERS EUR 37 M IN AID TO UKRAINE

Hungary is offering Ukraine aid worth 37 million euros, Péter Szijjártó, Hungary's minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Warsaw. Hungary opposes the war in Ukraine and wants peace to be restored in the region as soon as possible, the minister said at a donor conference organised by Poland and Sweden. Hungary stands on Ukraine's side and supports its sovereignty, he said. "We can obviously

make a clear distinction between the attacker and the attacked," Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary condemns the Russian military aggression and its "gross human rights violations", and joins calls for an immediate investigation of war crimes.

As a sign of solidarity, Hungary has granted safe haven to 670,000 Ukrainian refugees and has offered jobs to those who wish to stay here in the long term, as well as schooling for their children, he said, adding that Hungary is taking in and helping all Ukrainian refugees entering the country. Hungary is offering five types of aid: help in reconstructing a school and a hospital; delivery of mobile homes for internally displaced persons in western Ukraine; scholarships for one thousand Ukrainian university students; Hungarian hospitals are prepared to treat an unlimited number of wounded Ukrainian soldiers; and Hungary is ready to provide care for 130 Ukrainian children in special hospitals, Szijjártó said.

FIDESZ MEP: CALL TO STEP UP ACTION AGAINST HUNGARY, POLAND 'SHAMEFUL ATTACK'

The European parliamentary group of ruling Fidesz on Thursday rejected "shameful attacks on Hungary and Poland" after the EP passed a resolution calling on the European Commission and Council to step up action against Hungary and Poland for alleged breaches of the rule of law.

The resolution demands that Hungary and Poland make a “genuine commitment” to protecting European values and “meaningful progress” thereof, and that recovery funding should be withheld until “both countries comply fully” with recommendations regarding the rule of law.

Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi called for the cessation of “absurd accusations” against Hungary and respect for the right of Hungarians to their sovereignty. “In reality, we are being attacked because the European left wing can’t tolerate that Hungary’s nationally minded government has taken a firm stand for classical European values and traditions, and goes against the mainstream on issues such as migration and child protection,” he said, adding that it was “intolerable” that Brussels, and especially the European Parliament, had turned into a “self-righteous, post-modern witch-hunt club” seeking to impose “a narrow-minded, radical ideology” on all. Those resisting, he added, were being blackmailed with sanctions and aggressive attacks.

István Ujhelyi, MEP of the opposition Socialists, said the resolution had called on the EC to use all the means at its disposal to ensure that the citizens of Hungary and Poland are not deprived of the advantages of EU funding simply because their governments had violated the rule-of-law principle. “It solely depends on the government

when Hungary gets access to the frozen EU funds,” he said.

The European Union, he added, had not launched an ideological or political “witch-hunt” against the Hungarian government, but it demanded the observance of rules and norms based on common values as well as guarantees for the fair and transparent use of EU funds. “It is high time the government takes action and strikes a compromise with the European Union,” Hidvéghi said, adding that any delay would cause great harm to the Hungarian economy and the ordinary Hungarians.

RULING PARTIES CALL ON LEFTISTS TO CONDEMN EU’S NEW RUSSIA SANCTIONS

The ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrat alliance has called on MPs and MEPs of Hungary’s leftist opposition to “say a clear no” to the European Union’s new package of sanctions against Russia. In a video message released on Thursday, Fidesz communications chief István Hollik said the proposed European ban on oil imports would cause an instant jump in fuel prices. Hungary’s left wing “has supported Brussels rather than Hungarians in many international disputes in recent years”, Hollik said. “We are now asking them not to do so,” said, adding that “party politics should not override Hungarian national interests”.

GOVT OFFICIALS, ENERGY INDUSTRY HEADS MEET TO DISCUSS BRUSSELS OIL SANCTIONS

Senior government officials and Hungarian energy industry leaders met on Thursday at the prime minister’s office to discuss the country’s energy security in light of the latest EU sanctions package which includes phasing out Russian crude oil imports, according to the PM’s press chief. The meeting was attended by the prime minister, his chief of staff and cabinet head, the finance and the innovation and technology ministers, the PM’s state secretary for EU affairs and the head of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as the CEOs of state oil and gas company MOL and energy group MVM, and the head of the Hungarian energy sector authority, among others, Bertalan Havasi said in a statement.

After the European Commission released its latest package of sanctions against Russia, representatives of the Hungarian government underlined Hungary’s objection to further sanctions in their current form as they would threaten the country’s energy security and economy, he noted.

UNHCR DELEGATION HOLDS TALKS IN BUDAPEST

A delegation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Director-General of Swiss-based charitable international

humanitarian organisation Terre des Hommes, Barbara Hintermann, had talks with Deputy Mayor of Budapest Ambrus Kiss and his team at City Hall on Wednesday. "UNHCR was among the first international organisations that made contact and offered cooperation after the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine," it added. "According to their information, around 100,000-140,000 Ukrainian refugees are currently staying in Hungary, mostly in Budapest, but very little confirmed information is received about them from official sources," the statement said. UNHCR continually monitors shelters provided by the city and they have received good assessment, the Mayor's Office said. "These will be further developed in cooperation in the future," it added. "We will be working on jointly establishing facilities for refugees where a more comprehensive range of services will be offered," it said.

Consultations were held with Hintermann, accompanied by Dorina Ardeleanu, head of operations for Europe, Asia and Latin America at Terre des hommes, the Mayor's Office said. The organisation currently offers support at two shelters operated by the metropolitan council, and they plan to expand their presence to all facilities, it added. The Swiss organisation is also actively involved in the metropolitan council's work to make sport safer for children.

PROCUREMENT AUTHORITY: COMPETITION, TRANSPARENCY ENSURED IN HUNGARY

Competition and transparency are guaranteed in Hungary's public procurement procedures, the public procurement authority has said in connection with the European Commission's move to activate the rule-of-law mechanism against Hungary. In a statement, the authority said the EC had used "distorted data" when compiling its statistics on public procurements. The authority said the EC's database on public procurements was not suitable for making comparisons between member states, arguing that many EU countries often fail to publish the results of their public procurement tenders in the EU's official gazette TED. It said the commission had acknowledged that Hungary devoted special attention to publishing its public procurement data. The authority said it had pointed out the problem of missing data from other member states to the EC in 2018, 2019 and 2020 but had yet to receive a substantive response. Though the EC's statistics indicate a high share of public procurement procedures in Hungary with a single bidder, the body's Single Market Scoreboard clearly shows that "this is not just a Hungarian problem", and that the situation is similar in 19

member states, the statement said. According to the EC's data, the share of single-bid procedures in Hungary (39%) was lower than the same share in Romania (41%), Greece (42%), the Czech Republic (43%), Slovenia (47%) and Poland (51%), the authority said, adding that the EC had not launched rule-of-law procedures against those countries. The authority said the fact that some 5,000 bidders participate in public procurement procedures each year, of which around 3,500 are awarded contracts, indicated that there was open competition in Hungary's public procurements.

MENCZER SLAMS ROMANIA TOP COURT DECISION ON TÂRGU MUREŞ SECONDARY SCHOOL

A decision by Romania's supreme court which paves the way for the closure of the Ferenc Rákóczi II Catholic Secondary School in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely) "is appalling", the foreign ministry state secretary for communications has said. Tamás Menczer said on Facebook that "in the 21st century, schools should be opened instead of closed". He said Hungary expected the Romanian authorities to make urgent arrangements to ensure that the school remains open. In order to facilitate a solution, the foreign ministry is maintaining constant contact with the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, a member

of the ruling coalition, he added. He expressed hope that the issue would soon be settled and would not burden Hungary-Romania relations in the long term.

BAKONDI: MORE REFUGEE ARRIVALS LIKELY AFTER TRANSCARPATIA MISSILE ATTACK

Hungary could see more refugees crossing its border from Ukraine following Russia's missile attack on a train station in Transcarpathia on Tuesday, the prime minister's chief domestic security advisor said. György Bakondi told public current affairs channel M1 on Wednesday that the Russian attacks on western European and US weapons deliveries to Ukraine were likely to continue. This could result in even more people fleeing "the places in Transcarpathia that appear to be temporarily safe" to Hungary, he said. If this happens, Hungary will do everything to make sure that the refugees receive the same level of accommodation, care and assistance as those who have arrived so far, he said. Turning to the issue of illegal immigration, Bakondi said the Hungarian authorities have this year apprehended more than 61,000 illegal migrants at the southern border, adding that some 31,000 illegal border crossers had been caught by this time last year. He said both human smuggling activity and the number of illegal migrants attempting to enter Hungary had doubled since 2021.

BUDAPEST TO HOST FIRST CPAC IN EUROPE IN MID-MAY

Budapest will host the first US Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) ever to be held in Europe on May 19-20, the director of the Center for Fundamental Rights (AK) said. Miklós Szánthó told a press conference that AK is organising the event jointly with the American Conservative Union, adding that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been asked to give a keynote address. Guests will include former Republican senator Rick Santorum, who ran for the Republican nomination in the 2012 US presidential election, former Czech President Václav Klaus, Herbert Kickl, head of the Freedom Party of Austria, and Tom Van Grieken, head of the Belgian Vlaams Belang party. MPs and MEPs from Austria, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, and US congressmen will also attend the event. US media personalities Ben Ferguson and Candace Owens have also accepted invitations. The conference will be joined online by British politician Nigel Farage, Santiago Abascal, head of Spain's VOX party, and Tucker Carlson, a US media personality.

The event was originally scheduled to take place in late March but has been postponed due to the war in Ukraine.

MALTESE CHARITY TO DISTRIBUTE SOME HUF 500 M IN DONATIONS

The Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta on Thursday said it would distribute a record half a billion forints (EUR 1.3m) in donations among refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Hungarian unit of German retailer KiK has donated 60,000 gift cards worth 8,000 forints each which refugees can exchange for clothing or other items in any of KiK's Hungarian stores until July 31, the charity said. A portion of the gift cards will be delivered to the refugees directly by the Maltese Charity, with the rest to be delivered by other charity groups.

POLICE: OVER 11000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 5,490 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Wednesday, while another 6,067 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 239 people, the police website said on Thursday. 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 404 refugees, 112 children among them, by train, according to the municipal police website.

GUEST NIGHTS JUMP IN MARCH FROM LOW PANDEMIC BASE

Guest nights at commercial accommodations in Hungary soared 464% year on year to 1,427,000 in March, rising from a low base impacted by travel restrictions because of the pandemic and supported by a four-day weekend for the March 15 national holiday, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The number of guest nights spent by domestic travellers increased by 378% to 747,000 and the number spent by foreign visitors climbed 603% to 680,000. KSH noted that the number of guest nights was still 28% lower than in the same month in 2019, before the coronavirus crisis. Revenue of commercial accommodations increased by 546% year-on-year to 32 billion forints (EUR 84m) in March.

HOME BUILDING PERMIT ISSUES UP 15% IN Q1

The number of home building permits issued in Hungary rose by an annual 15.2% to 8,001 in the first quarter, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Thursday. The number of permits issued for homes in the capital jumped 174.4% to 2,077, while the number

issued for homes in county seats and cities with populations over 50,000 fell by 27.5% to 1,248 and the number issued in smaller cities edged down by 2.2% to 2,579.

Dániel Molnár, an analyst with economic researcher Századvég, said housing sentiment remains strong, reflected in the high number of building permit issues. He noted, however, that producer prices in the construction sector are rising, making home building more expensive and labour shortages are an ongoing challenge for the sector. Magyar Bankholding chief analyst Gergely Suppan said that since 2016 nearly 202,000 building permits have been issued, but only close to 116,000 homes have been completed, showing a backlog of 86,000 and pointing to serious delays. He said home constructions continue to lag behind pre-crisis levels, international rates and the rate needed for the renewal of domestic housing stock.

NBH, EIB DEAL BROADENS OPTIONS FOR GREEN PROJECT FINANCING

The National Bank of Hungary (NBH) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed an agreement on Thursday that the sides said will

expand options for financing long-term green projects in the country. The agreement allows the EIB to provide more long-term loans in forints to the local economy, supporting sustainable economic growth, the post-pandemic recovery and climate action. The EIB will offer fixed-rate loans with terms up to 20 years to clients in Hungary and in return will provide the NBH with access to euros for their operations. "This cooperation will mitigate the exchange rate risk currently affecting Hungarian borrowers of loans in euro and allows more long-term investments in infrastructure, climate action, sustainable cities and regions, and environmental sustainability," said EIB VP Teresa Czerwinska.

NBH deputy-governor Barnabás Virág called the agreement with the EIB "another important step towards supporting the financing of domestic green projects". He noted that the central bank earlier launched the Green Mortgage Bond Purchase Programme and the Green Home Programme, in line with its green mandate. "Environmental sustainability considerations do not affect the general orientation of monetary policy," he added.