

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamás Kovács

Giro d'Italia kicks off from Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

War in Ukraine

Jobbik congress

Giro d'Italia

TOP STORY

ORBÁN SLAMS PLANNED OIL SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA

The European Union's proposal on phasing out imports of Russian crude oil is "unacceptable", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Friday, adding it was equivalent to "dropping a nuclear bomb on the Hungarian economy".

In a regular interview with public broadcaster Kossuth Rádió, the prime minister said EU member states had agreed earlier that the bloc should only take steps that take into consideration the different energy mixes of member states and their sovereign right to decide on them. However, the president of the European Commission "either willingly or unwillingly, attacked this hard-fought European unity", he added.

Orbán said the EU proposal to phase out Russian oil imports was equivalent to "dropping a nuclear bomb on the Hungarian economy", adding that its approval would "be the end of the utility price caps". Petrol prices could reach 700 forints (EUR 1.80) per litre and diesel could cost up to 800 forints, he said.

Replacing Russian oil imports would take years and cost several hundreds of millions of forints, while changes to Hungary's energy transmission system would cost thousands of billions of forints, he said. At the same time, a costly investment bringing results in 4-5 years may not "make sense" as the root of all problems, the war in Ukraine, "is here now", he said.

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ORBÁN: EU PLANNED SANCTIONS ON RUSSIAN OIL MAY CAUSE FUEL SHORTAGE

The EU's proposal to phase out Russian oil may create a situation where Hungary runs out of fuel and other oil products important for its industry, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán warned in an interview on Friday. Hungary will not accept such a proposal, he said. At the same time, Hungary will be happy to discuss proposals in line with Hungarian interests, he said.

Revamping Hungary's energy production and transmission system to oil products other than those from Russia would take up to five years, he said. While the EU has allocated money to funding the developments, "they are yet to give us that money, and we cannot start the works until that arrives", unless Hungary takes out loans from the market to cover the costs, he said. "I have sent this back to President [Ursula von der Leyen] to be reworked, we are now waiting for the new proposal," he said.

Hungary must at least maintain its veto on the issues most important for the country, he said. As a result, he said he had been willing to approve the first five packages of sanctions but made it clear that the energy embargo would be a red line.

They also wanted to put Orthodox leader Patriarch Kirill of Moscow on the sanctions list but "we will not support including church leaders"

on the list because that would affect the freedom of religion for Hungarian communities which is "sacred and inviolable", Orbán said.

Hungary stands for peace and wants the parties in the Ukraine war to agree to a ceasefire and start peace talks as soon as possible, Orbán said. He noted that he had visited Moscow "in the interest of peace" before the war started in February, as had French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. None of them succeeded, he said. Hungary must stay out of this war, he said, adding that at the same time, the country was providing record-large humanitarian aid. Hungarian society as a whole has become mobilised, he said. "Hungarians are now disregarding how Ukrainians used to treat ethnic Hungarians in recent years because currently we only focus on the people that suffer," he added. Delivering weapons to Ukraine would "distance Hungary from peace ... delivering weapons brings trouble on the head of those involved, especially if they are neighbours of the country at war", he said. Orbán said that "Transcarpathia has come within striking range" because someone is delivering or planning to deliver weapons and the Russians will target the transport junctions where such trans-shipments travel.

Orbán said that he planned to present members of his new, "significantly reshuffled" government between May 20 and 30. He said considerable changes were planned,

"reflecting the many considerable changes in the world". Christian Democrat, nationally minded governments usually start work by assessing the challenges of the upcoming four years, Orbán said. Protection against migration pressure must be boosted, he said. "The [coronavirus] pandemic has not disappeared" and there is a war going on, he added. "We must form a government that is able to protect Hungary," he said.

GULYÁS: LATEST SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA NOT TO AFFECT STATES EQUALLY

The economic impact of the latest sanctions on Russia is a decision the consequences of which can be clearly calculated mathematically, and it will not affect countries equally, the prime minister's chief of staff told commercial news channel HírTV on Thursday. "Hungary and Slovakia are in the worst situation," Gergely Gulyás said, with Hungary relying on Russian crude oil for about two-thirds of its oil consumption. The ratio in Slovakia is even higher, he added.

Under the proposed sanctions, petrol in Hungary would cost 700 forints (EUR 1.8) per litre while diesel would rise to 800 forints, Gulyás said, adding that the security of Hungary's supplies could not be guaranteed either. "This is why the government has made it clear that it cannot support any sanctions in this form,"

Gulyás said, noting that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán clearly stated Hungary's position in his letter written to the head of the European Commission on Thursday.

Hungary will keep to the sanctions which were adopted at the EU summit in Versailles in March, Gulyás said, noting that these sanctions do not cover crude or natural gas. "We must adopt sanctions that will hurt those whom we want to punish but not those who otherwise want to punish Russia over the aggression committed against Ukraine more so," he said. He said that Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic had expressed "serious concern" over energy sanctions. "We need full unity; without that sanctions cannot be adopted, and if the European Commission wants to maintain the unity which emerged because of the war, it must enter into talks," Gulyás said. "Hungary can tell exactly how much extra the situation would cost the country compared with other member states, in what aspect is its situation different, and what sort of expenses it would expect Brussels to reimburse, Gulyás said.

ROGÁN: HUNGARY TO BUILD 317KM OF NEW ROADS TILL 2032

The consortium led by private equity fund Themis has been awarded a concession to build and maintain motorways in Hungary for the next 35 years, Antal Rogán, who heads the Prime Minister's cabinet office,

said on Friday, adding that 317km of new roads will be built until 2032. The concession holder will also add lanes to 265km of existing road in the first ten years of the contract, Rogán told a forum in Budapest. The concession involves the upkeep of 1,044km of road, he said, adding that all of the maintenance works were considered priority projects. As regards financing, Rogán said the state will pay a concession fee and will pay for the full construction and maintenance project over the 35-year period. He added that the concession holder would have to obtain the credit necessary to carry out the project at its own expense. The road tolls to be collected by the state will have to cover the concession payments for the full 35-year period, he said.

The state will pay Themis an annual concession fee of 96.2 million forints (EUR 254,000) per kilometre. The state will not transfer its right to collect motorway tolls, he said. Rogán said the concession procedure was fully in line with European Union rules.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 3.6% IN MARCH - KSH

Industrial output in Hungary grew by an annual 3.6% in March, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of data on Friday. Adjusted for the number of workdays, output climbed 4.2%, KSH said. For the period January-March, industrial output rose by 5.5% from the same period a year earlier. Month on month, output edged

down a seasonally and workday-adjusted 0.1%. KSH said automotive sector output "fell significantly" in March. Output of the other two big manufacturing sector segments -- computers, electronics and optical equipment, and food, drink and tobacco products -- rose over headline growth, it added.

Magyar Bankholding chief analyst Gergely Suppan said output growth "exceeded all expectations" in March. He said supply chain interruptions remained a "significant risk", not only for the automotive sector, but for companies turning out aluminium or artificial fertiliser. Magyar Bankholding analysts put full-year industrial output growth around 5-6%, amid "marked uncertainty", supported by base effects and new capacities, he added. ING Bank senior analyst Péter Virovác said the slowdown was "hardly a surprise", given the series of automotive industry scale-backs after the outbreak of the war as companies faced parts shortages.

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

Fully 5,699 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Thursday, while another 6,508 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 476 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 added. Budapest police received 551 refugees, 156 children among them, by train, according to the municipal police website.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO SEND OVER 500,000 TESTS TO THREE COUNTRIES

Hungary is sending 455,000 rapid antigen coronavirus tests to Moldova, 72,000 to North Macedonia and 30,000 to Montenegro on Saturday to help their protection efforts against the coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Friday. Hungary has been helping to combat the coronavirus pandemic by sending vaccines and protective gear to other countries, which "has not disappeared although the war in Ukraine and the grave security challenges the region is facing have eclipsed it in the public discourse," Szijjártó said.

Moldova, a strategic partner of Hungary and another neighbour of war-torn Ukraine, has seen hundreds of thousands of refugees arriving since the war started in February, he said. "Testing refugees requires strenuous effort, and Hungary wishes to ease the pressure on the local health-care system," he said.

SZIGET FESTIVAL 'DOESN'T BELIEVE IN CULTURAL EMBARGO', SAYS CHIEF ORGANISER

Sziget Festival "does not believe in cultural embargoes", Tamas Kádár, the chief organiser of the week-long musical extravaganza held on Budapest's Hajógyári Island, said on Friday, adding that this year's event would feature both Russian and Ukrainian performers. The festival's organisers "condemn the Russian aggression of war" and support peace, Kádár told a press conference. The festival scheduled for August 10-15 will feature concerts by Dua Lipa,

Justin Bieber, the Arctic Monkeys, Tame Impala, DJ Calvin Harris and the Kings of Leon. Visitors will get to see artists from 52 countries, and the event will feature around 1,000 programmes overall. Sziget remains committed to green causes and its future is secured by a 5+5-year agreement with the Budapest municipal council, organisers said. The festival was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

GIRO D'ITALIA GETS UNDER WAY IN BUDAPEST

The 105th edition of the Giro d'Italia cycling race got under way from Budapest's Heroes' Square on Friday. Day one of the three-week race will see 176 riders from 22 teams cover 195 kilometres. The first stage runs from Budapest to Visegrád through Székesfehérvár and Esztergom, giving riders an elevation change of 900 metres. The stage finish is expected between 5pm and 5.30pm.