

PHOTO OF THE DAY



President Katalin Novák at her inauguration ceremony in Kossuth Square

MTI/Szilárd Kosztesák

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parliament elects prime minister

EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels

War in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: WAR MUSTN'T SPREAD BEYOND UKRAINE

The position taken by NATO on the war in Ukraine remains aligned with Hungary's national interests, namely that everything must be done to prevent the conflict from spreading beyond Ukraine's borders, the foreign minister said.

Addressing a press conference during a break in an informal meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Berlin on Sunday, Péter Szijjártó said that as a neighbouring country to Ukraine, what mattered most to Hungary was that the conflict did not spread beyond Ukraine's borders. Everyone in NATO "knows that Hungary is on the side of peace" and as a neighbour to Ukraine is in a "special situation", Szijjártó said. He underlined that NATO is a defence alliance, "and our most important duty and interest is protecting Hungary and the Hungarian people". The position that everything must be done to prevent direct conflict between NATO and Russia also enjoys broad support, he said. On the topic of sanctions, Szijjártó said it was "pointless" to impose sanctions that "hurt us more than the country we would impose them on". Concerning Finland's and Sweden's bids to join NATO, he said Hungary had always backed the alliance's "open door policy", adding, at the same time, that the position expressed by Turkey should also be taken into consideration.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY BACKS NATO STANCE ON 'STRATEGIC DIALOGUE WITH RUSSIA'

Hungary fully supports NATO's stance on the need to maintain "strategic dialogue with Russia" in the interest of preventing an escalation of the conflict in Ukraine and any "tragic consequences due to certain misunderstandings", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Sunday. Addressing a press conference during a break in an informal meeting with his NATO counterparts in Berlin, Szijjártó said Hungary welcomed this week's phone call between the US secretary of defence and Russia's defence minister. The situation concerning the war is "extremely fragile" and requires great caution, Szijjártó said. "We, of course, understand and respect that quite a few member states" are aiding Ukraine with weapons deliveries, he said, adding, at the same time, that it was crucial that those deliveries are not made "within the framework of NATO". The members of the alliance agree that "NATO is not sending weapons into this conflict", he said. The reason why Hungary has decided not to send weapons to its north-eastern neighbour and has banned the transit of weapons deliveries through its territory into Ukraine is to ensure that the country does not get dragged into the war, he added.

Concerning the humanitarian aspects of the crisis, Szijjártó said he

had told the meeting that Hungary has taken in almost 700,000 refugees from Ukraine. "We of course allow entry to everyone fleeing the war and provide care for them," he said. Based on the "dynamics" of the war, the number of refugees entering Hungary is not declining, and Hungary is prepared to help anyone fleeing the war, he said.

As regards NATO's planned new Strategic Concept, Szijjártó said the alliance must also pay attention to "security challenges" from the south as well as terrorism and illegal migration. Terrorist groups are looking to take advantage of the fact that Europe's focus is on the war in Ukraine, and with both Russia and Ukraine being among the world's top grain exporters, a fall in exports due to the conflict could cause serious food shortages in areas that are already less stable, Szijjártó said. This could lead to a rise in extremism and terrorism, which in turn could lead to the emergence of new migration waves, he added.

NOVÁK INAUGURATED AS PRESIDENT

Katalin Novák was inaugurated as Hungary's new president in a ceremony in front of Parliament on Saturday. In her inaugural address, Novák underscored her responsibility to show the country what her homeland and compatriots meant to her and to express her views "on our shared life and place in the world". "We are here together in the heart of Europe, the nation's capital, the middle

of the Carpathian Basin, in the nation's main public square, but we are also together in our intent and desire to create a brighter, more peaceful, richer and more secure life for Hungarians in the 21st century after the decades that led up to the moral crisis of the 20th century," the president said.

Novák said the war in Ukraine had cast a shadow over the lives of Hungarians. The initial shock that came from the attack on Ukraine had to be followed by immediate but well-thought-out long-term responses from Hungary as well, she said. When the first groups of refugees arrived in Hungary on February 25, Hungarians rushed to their aid without hesitation, she added. Since then, some 700,000 refugees have crossed into Hungary, Novák said, adding that Hungarians had collected hundreds of millions of forints' worth of donations, provided care for the wounded, sent food to those who stayed home and provided shelter, food, jobs and schooling for families. Hungary passed the test in humanity with flying colours, she said, adding that the country also needed to know what its response was to the war and what its interests were. Condemning Russia's aggression, Novák said Hungary would "forever say no to any ambition to restore the Soviet Union". Hungarians want peace, she said, demanding an investigation into and punishment of war crimes. Hungary is not neutral, Novák said, adding that "we stand on the side of the innocent victims and justice." Hungary fulfils its obligations

stemming from its membership in the European Union and NATO, she said. Hungary will not give up its sovereignty and supports Ukraine joining the community of European countries, she said. Hungary is prepared to make sacrifices for peace and does not block its allies from making sacrifices, either, but it will not agree to decisions that demand sacrifices from Hungarians that are greater than the amount of pain they would inflict on Russia, Novák said. The president offered to mediate in the interest of the resumption of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, and expressed her support for the interests of Ukraine's ethnic Hungarian community.

Novák vowed to work to ensure that Hungarians are understood and respected, saying it was a testament to the work done over the past decade that Hungarians could again "live with their heads held high" and could view the world looking out for Hungarian interests. "Hungarian self-confidence, identity and national pride -- which had been lacking for a long time -- have returned." "Let's preserve and safeguard our national pride and make sure that national pride does not become national arrogance, but that it does not turn into globalist cowardice, either," she said.

Novák called on the members of the new parliament to respect the trust that has been given to them and to respect the constitutional framework of legislation. She noted that lawmakers will elect the prime

minister on Monday, who will then soon appoint the members of the new government. Novák said that as a citizen of Hungary, she expects those in charge of the executive branch to preserve the security of the Hungarian people. Novák said that as president she would strengthen Hungarians in the values based on Christianity, encourage them to have children and raise them in loving homes, support the protection of conceived human life and families and encourage them to respect each other and defend the weak. She vowed to speak out in favour of helping young people start families, raise their children and take care of the elderly. "Let's protect the order of creation and the created world," Novák said, underlining the importance of supporting large families, stay-at-home parents, adoptive parents and single parents.

Saturday's ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Speaker of Parliament László Kövér and other senior officials. Novák was elected head of state by parliament on March 10. She is the sixth president since the 1989/90 change of political system.

JEWISH ORG LEADER CONGRATULATES NOVÁK ON PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION

András Heisler, president of Hungary's Jewish federation Mazsihisz, congratulated Katalin Novák on her inauguration as Hungary's new president, in a letter on Sunday. In his

letter published on the organisation's website, Heisler expressed hope that Novák would be successful in her role as head of state and would strengthen the unity of the nation. Heisler said Novák could count on Mazsihisz as Hungary's largest Jewish organisation, as well as the country's Jewish community. He noted that Novák had said in her inaugural address that Hungary was a safe home for the Jewish community. Heisler said joint efforts were needed to ensure that this remained the case. "We must protect our achievements," he said, offering Mazsihisz's partnership to the president. The protection of the Jewish or any minority community is a shared issue for every Hungarian citizen irrespective of religion, ethnicity or political views, he said. Heisler wished Novák strength and good health for her time in office.

Novák was inaugurated as head of state on Saturday. She is the sixth president since the 1989/90 change of political system.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARIANS MUST NOT BE MADE TO PAY PRICE OF UKRAINE WAR

Hungary's government insists that the Hungarian people must not be made to pay the price of the war in Ukraine, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Sunday. Speaking to public broadcaster Kossuth Radio, Szijjártó said Hungarians were in no way to blame for the outbreak of the war. Therefore if the European Commission

intends to impose an embargo on Russian oil, it must financially and physically guarantee that the decision will not hurt the Hungarian people or Hungary's energy security, he said. If the commission approved a proposal on an oil embargo right now, Hungary could not obtain the crude oil needed for its economy to function, the minister said. Whether there will be an agreement on the matter is up to the EC at this point, Szijjártó said, adding that the Hungarian government's position was clear. He said Brussels had yet to put forward a proposal that would compensate Hungary for the estimated 55-60% increase in fuel prices that an oil embargo would cause.

Szijjártó said it was easy to calculate the effects an embargo on Russian oil would have on Hungary. The government would only agree to such a proposal "if the European Commission offers a solution to the problems they created", he added. The first such problem, he said, was that Hungary's oil refinery would have to be technically refitted, which would cost 500-550 million euros. Also, a further 200 million euros would have to be spent on a capacity upgrade of the pipeline through Croatia, he added. If Hungary were to import crude not sourced from Russia, fuel prices in the country would rise by 55-60%, which would require a modernisation of Hungary's energy system that would cost 15-18 billion euros and take five years, according to experts, the minister said.

Szijjártó noted that EU member states had agreed a few months ago in Paris that any steps taken to end the continent's dependence on Russian energy would take into consideration the specific situation of each country. A total of 65% of Hungary's oil consumption comes from Russia, Szijjártó said, adding that the introduction of an oil embargo would therefore have "a nuclear bomb-like impact on the Hungarian economy".

HUNGARY SENDING 30,000 CORONAVIRUS RAPID TESTS TO CUBA

Hungary is sending 30,000 antigen test kits and 120 pieces of medical equipment to Cuba in the coming days, the foreign minister said on Saturday. Péter Szijjártó said in a video posted on Facebook that coronavirus still posed a great challenge in Cuba. Hungary, he noted, has been helping out in many cases, most recently sending test kits to Moldova, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Somalia and the Philippines. Hungary's government is also sending anaesthesia machines, patient monitors, ventilators, infusion pumps as well as docking stations for infusion pumps to Cuba, Szijjártó said. Thanks to the forward-looking, successful purchases of recent years, he said, Hungary is able to help countries that are in a difficult situation, "and we are doing what we can to help".

ANOTHER RENEWED BUDAPEST METRO SECTION REOPENS

A central stretch of Budapest's Metro 3, covering Kálvin Square, Corvin, and Semmelweis Klinikák, reopened on Saturday. The opening of the latest section means that service now runs between Kőbánya-Kispest and Kálvin Square along the metro line's southern section. Addressing the inauguration of the new section, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said the upgrade of the metro line spanned multiple city administrations, was a matter outside of partisan politics and was a shared issue for the entire country. Karácsony thanked the European Union and the Hungarian government for their support for the project, adding that he intended to carry on the dialogue with the government about the next metro upgrades. István Tarlós, the prime minister's commissioner in charge of the development of national transport and public services infrastructure and former mayor of Budapest, noted that Metro 3 was Hungary's busiest traffic route and that the renovation of the line had started in 2017. Tarlós said the project was the shared achievement of two city administrations and the government.

LMP CALLS FOR WAGE COMPENSATION, PAY RISE FOR PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES

The green LMP party on Sunday called for immediate wage compensation

and a mid-term pay rise programme for public sector employees because of inflation. Máté Kanász-Nagy, the party's co-leader, told a press conference that average inflation is close to 9% according to the latest data published by the Central Statistical Office earlier this week. Inflation has hit its highest level in the past 20 years, he said. This particularly affects public sector employees, who have lower average incomes than those working in the private sector and spend a higher portion of their income on food, he said. Kanász-Nagy cited the prices of some food products as examples. He said the price of margarine increased by 38% from a year earlier, and the price of bread and poultry rose by almost 30%. He said inflation had a twofold effect, arguing that it hit lower-income earners while the state had more revenue from value added

tax, giving the government room for manoeuvre to offset the price increases. He urged an immediate wage compensation of at least the inflation rate, that is close to 10%, for public sector workers, adding that a mid-term pay rise programme should also be launched for them to reduce the income gap with private sector employees.

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

Fully 5,852 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Saturday, while another 6,605 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 353 people, the police website said on

Sunday. 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 132 refugees, 74 children among them, by train, according to the municipal police website. Meanwhile, the municipal government office of Budapest said staff at the BOK sports and events centre serving as a humanitarian transit point had helped 446 refugees on Saturday, accommodating 67 of whom stayed overnight. The BOK centre provides food and drink, medical services, toilets, internet access and help with travel arrangements in cooperation with charity organisations and volunteers. National railways MÁV operates a ticket office at the site, while buses are provided to take people to the main train stations and the airport.