

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

Riders at the draw for the start order of the National Gallop qualifying races

UPCOMING EVENTS

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán visits Belgrade

Events related to war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

JUSTICE MIN HAILS 'CONSTRUCTIVE' EC TALKS

Hungary has conducted its talks with the European Commission aimed at boosting the transparency of public procurements "in a constructive spirit" over the summer, the justice minister has said.

European partners have recognised this, Judit Varga said. It is also crucial that Hungary's partners get a better understanding of the country's stance on the rule-of-law procedures, the war in Ukraine and the energy sanctions imposed on Russia, Varga told MTI after talks with French President Emmanuel Macron's Europe advisor and Laurence Boone, France's state secretary for European affairs. Varga noted that Hungary had put forward several proposals in its response letter to the European Commission late last month, and was in agreement with its negotiating partners at the talks in Brussels that the transparent utilisation of EU funds was as much in the interest of EU citizens as it was in that of Hungarian taxpayers. "It is a shared interest for which the Hungarian government has been able to provide far-reaching guarantees," the minister said. "We have done everything the EU has asked, so we await the positive evaluation," she added. Varga praised the "constructive, positive and solution-oriented tone" of the talks between the EC and Hungary.

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VARGA: ‘TALKS CONSTRUCTIVE’

Justice Minister Judit Varga said Hungarian representatives had reacted to “specific questions and proposals”. “We’re working to maintain this positive mood and conduct with the European Commission, which right now is part of the solution,” she said. “It’s good if the powerful European countries keeping up with the talks between the European Commission and Hungary know all this.” Concerning Hungary’s proposals, the minister noted that Hungary will reduce the share of public procurement procedures with a single bidder to below 15%, ensure legal remedy against the prosecutor’s decisions in corruption cases, set up an authority to oversee and guarantee the regularity of public procurements at the highest level and develop performance measurement systems that will also assess the cost-effectiveness of public procurements.

Varga’s talks in Paris also touched on the EU’s sanctions imposed on Russia. She said the war and associated sanctions had caused Europe’s economic hardships such as inflation, sky-high food and energy prices, and unstable energy supplies, adding that Hungary’s standpoint on energy-related sanctions was based on facts on the ground rather than being ideologically motivated. “New energy sanctions would prove fatal for central Europe for historical, geographical

and physical reasons, while Europe’s interests wouldn’t be served either,” she said. The emphasis should be on working for peace instead of enhancing “wartime sanctions”, she said, adding that it should be recognised that sanctions “are more damaging to the side that enforces them than to their target”. Varga said the French were “very pragmatic”. “The notion of the European community projected by President Emmanuel Macron is crucial for the future of Europe,” she said, noting points of commonality in Hungarian and French positions.

Varga travelled on to Madrid to discuss the upcoming Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian EU presidency. Spain takes over the presidency in July next year before handing it over to Belgium in December. In the second half of 2024, Hungary will take over. She said the Hungarian presidency would play a decisive role in the establishment of a new European Commission and Council after the European Parliament elections. “Hungary always backs European solutions that do not ignore people’s interests,” she said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: GOVT’S ENERGY STANCE BASED ENTIRELY ON HUNGARIAN INTERESTS

When it comes to European Union proposals on energy supply, the government bases its position entirely on Hungarian interests and it has nothing to do with considerations

related either to Ukraine or Russia, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said after meeting his Finnish counterpart on Thursday. At a joint press conference held with Pekka Haavisto in Budapest, Szijjártó welcomed the withdrawal of the EU gas price cap proposal, saying Hungarian energy security would have been compromised since Russian gas supplies to the country were at stake. He said the government backed European attempts to reduce energy consumption but purely on a voluntary basis. Energy taxes should only be levied at national level, he added. The minister said European proposals should treat energy supply as a pragmatic rather than a “political or ideological issue”. Meanwhile, Szijjártó noted that a Finnish foreign minister had not visited Hungary in the past twelve years, and friendship and kinship between the two nations warranted more intensive relations. He praised bilateral relations and cooperation in UN organisations, as well as the increase in trade turnover, which reached 650 million euros last year. Around 70 Finnish companies employ more than 5,000 in Hungary, he added. Responding to journalists’ questions, Szijjártó said he had met the new US ambassador the previous day for a “pleasant” 90-minute conversation. Whereas neither attempted to resolve differences of opinion, they looked at ways each country could count on the other to improve relations, he said, adding that they made a personal commitment to work towards this.

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Commenting on the European Parliament’s report on Hungary and the rule of law, the minister said “well-paid EP representatives” should address real European problems instead of “repeating all kinds of false accusations” against Hungary. “We wonder whether some people in Strasbourg and Brussels actually think that Hungarians are not sufficiently mature to decide on their own future,” he said. On the topic of the expansion of Hungary’s Paks nuclear power station, Szijjártó said the EU had made clear there were no restrictions on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Notwithstanding attempts to hobble the project, “whoever hinders ... [it] breaks European rules and violates our national sovereignty.”

EP ADOPTS REPORT ON HUNGARY RULE OF LAW

The European Parliament on Thursday passed a report on the state of the rule of law in Hungary. According to the report approved with 433 votes in favour, 123 against and 28 abstentions, European Union values are under threat in Hungary, and the country can no longer be considered a full democracy. The report says democracy and fundamental rights in Hungary had further deteriorated through the “deliberate and systematic efforts of the Hungarian government” since the EP launched the Article 7 procedure against the country in 2018. The protection of EU values enshrined in the bloc’s founding

treaties have deteriorated since 2018, the report said, adding that the situation had been “exacerbated by EU inaction”. The lack of decisive EU action, it said, had contributed to the emergence of a “hybrid regime of electoral autocracy”. The report said the state of Hungary’s justice system, corruption, conflicts of interest and human rights remained key concerns, as did the functioning of the country’s constitutional and electoral system and freedom of expression, including media pluralism. It also lists academic and religious freedom, freedom of association, the right to equal treatment, including LGBTQ rights, minority rights, the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees as “problematic” areas. The report calls on the European Commission to make full use of all tools at its disposal, especially the mechanism in the EU budget linking funding to the rule of law, to remedy the situation. The MEPs who backed the report also urged the EC not to approve Hungary’s post-pandemic recovery plan until the country has fully complied with all relevant European Semester recommendations and implemented all the relevant judgements of the EU court and the European Court of Human Rights. They also called on the executive body to exclude Hungary from funding cohesion programmes where there is suspicion of the misuse of EU funds or rule-of-law violations. Also, EU funds should be distributed through local governments rather than government organisations, they said.

FIDESZ BLASTS EP FOR WAGING ‘CONTINUED ATTACKS AGAINST HUNGARY’

Hungary’s ruling Fidesz party blasted the European Parliament for “still busily attacking Hungary even amid the current crisis”, after the EP voted to approve the Hungary rule-of-law report on Thursday. The European Parliament on Thursday passed a report on the state of the rule of law in Hungary. According to the report approved with 433 votes in favour, 123 against and 28 abstentions, European Union values are under threat in Hungary, and the country can no longer be considered a full democracy. Fidesz said in a statement: “The people of Europe are enduring an energy crisis thanks to Brussels’ failed sanctions, yet the left-wing European Parliament’s priority, even so, is to attack Hungary.” “Brussels wants to punish Hungary ... and withhold the money that is due to the country,” it added. Fidesz attributed the EP vote to the government’s refusal to allow illegal migrants into Hungary and LGBTQ propaganda into schools, as well as its opposition to “Brussels’ sanctions that have caused the energy crisis”. Referring to Hungarian MEP Klára Dobrev, the statement decried Hungarian left-wing MEPs “led by Ms. Gyurcsány” for “working against their own country”.

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NOVÁK TO HEAD HUNGARIAN DELEGATION AT UN ASSEMBLY

President Katalin Novák will head Hungary's delegation at the 77th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the presidential office told MTI. Novák is scheduled to fly to New York directly from London, after attending the funeral service of Queen Elizabeth II. The Hungarian delegation will include Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and State Secretary Péter Sztáray, as well as other government officials. The session is held between Sept. 13 and 27, with Novák addressing the assembly on Sept. 21.

SZIJJÁRTÓ MEETS PAKISTAN CHIEF OF STAFF

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó met Qamar Javed Bajwa, chief of staff of Pakistan's military, for talks in Budapest on Thursday. The talks focused on the war in Ukraine, Szijjártó said on Facebook. "The war is a challenge for all countries, but it especially impacts regions that have been facing difficulties and disasters already," the minister added. Szijjártó and Bajwa agreed that "all measures aimed at ending the war should be promoted, while others leading to further escalation of the conflict should at least be dropped".

The European Union's sanctions policy's failure is "increasingly obvious" as "attempts to weaken Russia could bring Europe to its knees", Szijjártó said.

At the talks, agreement was reached that Hungary will provide assistance to Pakistan aimed at mitigating the impacts of recent floods, the minister said, adding that Hungary will send medicines and hygiene products to Pakistan, and double the number of scholarships for Pakistani youth at Hungarian universities.

SERBIAN PRESIDENT TO GRANT STATE AWARD TO ORBÁN

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán will pay a one-day working visit to Serbia at the invitation of President Aleksandar Vučić on Friday, the prime minister's press chief said. Orbán is scheduled to hold talks with Vučić, who will present him the Order of Merit of the Republic of Serbia "in recognition of his outstanding services in developing and strengthening peaceful cooperation and friendly relations between Serbia and Hungary," Bertalan Havasi said. According to Serbian press commentary, ties between Belgrade and Budapest have reached the highest level ever, attributed to the two leaders' personal relations and efforts.

LOCAL GOVTS CALL FOR HOLDING NATIONAL ENERGY SUMMIT

The alliance of local governments MÖSZ is calling for a national energy summit to be held before the start of the heating season with a view

to working out a solution to rising energy prices. Addressing a press conference on Thursday, Gödöllő Mayor György Gémesi, who heads MÖSZ, said the summit should involve energy experts, service providers, as well as local council and government representatives. He also said MÖSZ wants the government to introduce an energy price cap for localities that will allow them to operate their institutions until April 15. In response to a question, Gémesi said rising energy prices were bringing in "enormous revenues" for the central budget. "We'd like ... a part of that in the interest of our security," he said.

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony, a co-leader of the alliance, said MÖSZ was calling for the energy summit so that local councils, the government and energy sector players could agree on a solution that will ensure the provision of public services. The energy market is currently "extremely unpredictable", he said, adding that a cap on the price of energy would restore security for a brief period. Karácsony said MÖSZ encouraged the government to take on an active role in finding a joint European solution to rising energy prices. He added, however, that Hungary's problems would not be as severe had it invested more in renewable energy and energy efficiency over the last ten years.

Meanwhile, asked about Hungary's new abortion rules making abortion conditional on the mother listening to the foetus's heartbeat, Karácsony said: "Without going into this deep

ideological and worldview debate, I think people are rightfully upset." The Budapest city council is prepared to cooperate with the government on programmes aimed at reducing unwanted pregnancies, he said.

INTL OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTE CHIEF VISITS HUNGARIAN PRISON SERVICE DIRECTORATE

Chris Field, president of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI), has paid visits to Hungary's prison service directorate BVOP and the prison of Veszprém in the company of Ákos Kozma, commissioner for fundamental rights. Major General János Schmehl, BVOP's deputy chief in charge of security and detention, briefed Field on the basic tasks of the prison service and major development projects of the past few years, BVOP said in a statement. In Veszprém, a city in western Hungary, the IOI president was briefed on prison conditions, security measures, and efforts to reintegrate the inmates. Both sides qualified the meeting as useful. BVOP said the IOI delegation praised the professional work of the prison staff, the excellent accommodation of inmates, the security system, and the treatment of prisoners.

NOVÁK INAUGURATES CRÈCHE IN NE HUNGARY

Hungary now has crèches in over 1,000 localities -- three times more than a

decade ago -- Hungarian President Katalin Novák said in Hernádnémeti, in north-east Hungary. Inaugurating a new crèche in the village on Thursday, Novák said the 290 million forint (EUR 720,000) investment was a sign "of our trust and belief in the future, and that we build for the children of the future." Hungary's education system currently offers four types of crèches for children under the age of three, she said. Hernádnémeti's independent mayor, Zsolt Orosz, said that the 700sqm crèche was built with a budget of 274 million forints, with the local authority contributing 15 million forints of its own resources. The crèche will provide for 48 small children, he said.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER: FIGHTING DROUGHTS STRATEGIC ISSUE

Taking measures against droughts is a strategic task for the national economy, the minister of agriculture told a local conference, calling for irrigation canals to be renewed nationwide and new large reservoirs to be built. István Nagy called for efforts to increase the level of ground waters, and said building a dam on the River Tisza in the Csongrád area was unavoidable. The dam would raise water levels in the river and help areas along the river to retain water, he said. "Over one fifth of Hungary's arable land has simply dried out," Nagy said referring to the droughts in recent months. He noted the government's efforts to aid affected farmers, including a moratorium on

debt service, and subsidies to help them buy fodder for the animal stock and to pay increased energy bills. He also said changes to the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy would make direct subsidies available also to areas "crucial for the environment, climate, or biodiversity" from next year on, which he said could encourage farmers on some 100,000 hectares to preserve forests, pastures, and moorland, thus promoting economical water management. Referring to Hungary's recently established irrigation communities, the minister said over 85,000 hectares of a total 174,200 hectares of land with an irrigation licence were actually irrigated in 2021. Fully 60% of Hungary's territory is arable land; 50% of that area is used for growing wheat, corn and barley, and 20% for industrial plants, sunflowers and rapeseeds, Nagy said, adding that both wheat and corn were "among the most vulnerable plants" in terms of climate change. "Under this climate they could only be safely produced through irrigation," he said.

PFIZER'S SINGLE-DOSE COVID VACCINE TO BE ADMINISTERED TO HEALTH- CARE WORKERS FIRST

A new, single-jab coronavirus vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech, of which Hungary has so far received 109,000 doses, will be first used as a booster for vaccinated health-care workers, according to koronavirus.gov.hu. The vaccine will be available

for the Hungarian public from next week. Government offices are also assessing demand in care homes, it said. Hungary has ordered 9.5 million doses of the vaccine in a European Union purchase programme launched in wake of the spread of the Omicron variant. It is expected to receive 3 million doses this year and 6.5 million in 2023. Of the latter, 1.5 million doses will be optimised for children, the website said.

SOME 12,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 6,175 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Wednesday, while another 5,803 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 165 people, ORFK told MTI 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. Fully 98 people, 40 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said.

FINMIN INAUGURATES NEW CHEESE PLANT IN S HUNGARY

The war-related inflation and energy crisis have highlighted the importance of self-sufficiency and a robust domestic agriculture and food industry, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said, inaugurating a cheese plant in Szekszárd, in southern Hungary. The 5 billion forint (EUR 12.4m) investment was supported by a 2 billion forint government grant. The new plant will produce 19,000 tonnes of cheese every year, he said. Despite the "wartime crisis", Hungarian food companies increased their investments to 170 billion forints on the first half of 2022, he said. Thanks to government support, the output of Hungarian agriculture has grown by almost 30% in the past 12 years, he added. By now,

over 70% of food sold in retail stores comes from domestic sources, he said. The government has supported the sector with a loan moratorium and new loans amid the grave drought, he said.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR UP 3.0% IN JULY

Output of Hungary's construction sector rose by an annual 3.0% in July, after shrinking by 8.1% in the previous month, the Central Statistics Office (KSH) said on Thursday in a first reading of data. Output of the buildings segment edged up by 0.5% and civil engineering output increased by 7%. In absolute terms, construction sector output reached 601.1 billion forints (EUR 1.5bn) in July. The buildings segment accounted for 52% of the total. Month on month, the sector's output rose by 5.8%, adjusted for seasonal and workday effects. For the period January-July, construction sector output increased by an annual 6.3%.