

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Szinetvéri

At the opening of the World Press Photo 2022 exhibition, National Museum

UPCOMING EVENTS

Meetings surrounding UN General Assembly session

Moody's reviews Hungary's debt rating

Events related to war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

ORBÁN CALLS ON EU TO DROP SANCTIONS

The Russia-Ukraine war is no longer a local conflict, Viktor Orbán told a meeting of the ruling Fidesz and Christian Democratic parties. European Union sanctions against Russia have turned it into a global economic war, he said.

The prime minister called on the alliance's MPs to work strenuously to ensure that the EU drops its sanctions before the end of the year, Magyar Nemzet online reported. Orbán said it was obvious that the war would be prolonged, and protecting Hungary's security, economy and sovereignty was now more important than ever. That is why the government set up a national defence fund, withdrew soldiers from the frontiers and set up a border patrol unit, he said, adding that additional troops were needed to defend the country.

While the war worries people, it is inflation that impacts them directly, Orbán said. Before the April elections economic trends seemed predictable despite the war, but the EU adopted its sanctions including a ban on oil and gas purchases, which has caused the price of gas to triple since June, the paper quoted him as saying. If the EU dropped its sanctions, prices would be halved immediately, similarly to inflation, Orbán said. Europe's economy would revive and a looming recession avoided, he added.

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ORBÁN: EUROPE HURTING MORE THAN RUSSIA

When at the start of the summer sanctions were imposed on Russia, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said, European bureaucrats pledged they would hurt Russia rather than the people of Europe ... since then it has become obvious that they are causing more harm to Europe than to Russia," he told a meeting of the ruling Fidesz and Christian Democratic parties. According to a Magyar Nemzet online article, Orbán added that a political opportunity to review the sanctions would arise in November.

Slamming Hungary's leftist parties, Orbán said they supported the sanctions. "The Gyurcsány era and its representatives, who have destroyed Hungary before, are now working to return," the paper quoted Orbán as saying. Referring to a recent announcement by former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány's Democratic Coalition party, Orbán said its shadow government was supported by "Brussels bureaucrats and NGOs of George Soros". "They are the paymasters, they did this in the election campaign and that is what they are doing now," he said.

Meanwhile, Orbán said the ruling parties would need to ensure energy supplies, protect families and jobs. Families are supported through a cap on household energy bills, as well as separate programmes to help them to firewood and coal, while

small and medium-sized businesses could benefit from programmes to help them with energy costs, he said, adding that service providers will receive government support as part of a new job protection action plan.

Orbán insisted that Hungary's energy supplies were secure. "There is sufficient natural gas, there is electricity and we have oil," Orbán said. "Sanctions have done serious damage to the country, but through hard work we can create a chance for Hungary to come out of the crisis as a country that can overtake in the bend," Orbán said.

FIDESZ CALLS ON GOVT TO LAUNCH 'NATIONAL CONSULTATION' ON EU RUSSIA SANCTIONS

The Fidesz and Christian Democrat parliamentary groups are asking the government to launch a "National Consultation" public survey on European Union sanctions against Russia. Máté Kocsis, the Fidesz group leader, told a press conference held during the break of a meeting of the two governing parliamentary groups that the survey's focus would be energy sanctions, giving Hungarians the chance to express their opinion of this matter too. Hungarians, he added, would be the first in Europe to give their opinion on the sanctions. The government will refer to the views of Hungarians in European debates on the matter, he added.

European sanctions will be a central theme in autumn legislative

sessions both in Hungary and the rest of Europe, he said. EU sanctions brought in at the start of the summer have not lived up to expectations, he added. "This isn't what the Brussels elite promised European citizens." After the first sanctions package, energy prices doubled in a single month and then tripled, he said. Russia became richer and Europe poorer, he added. Kocsis vowed that the ruling parties would work during the autumn session to ensure the abolition of energy sanctions.

Meanwhile, he said the ruling parties will launch a national security review of left-wing party campaign financing from abroad. Kocsis insisted that in the past thirty years, it was unprecedented for a left-wing prime minister candidate -- as Péter Márki-Zay did -- to "carelessly or deliberately" admit that several billion forints in campaign support had come from abroad. "We are facing one of the most outrageous political scandals of the past thirty years," he said, adding that campaign financing to political parties from abroad was against the law in Hungary.

On the topic of the energy crisis, the Fidesz group leader called on citizens to conserve energy, and he said the government had started doing so, noting that it was 18 C. in the conference room of the hotel where the group meeting was held.

Parliament's chief items on the autumn session's agenda include proposals for expanded family support to be introduced from January 2023

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and decisions necessary for a funding deal with the European Commission, he said. To strike this deal, a deviation from house rules will be requested to pass some of the necessary legislation by the Oct. 4 deadline. The votes of four-fifths of MPs are needed to achieve this, so the support of some opposition politicians is required, he added.

NOVÁK AT UN: PEACE SHOULD BE TOP PRIORITY

Hungary urges members of the United Nations to declare peace a top priority amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict, President Katalin Novák said in her address to the 77th UN General Assembly session in New York. Marking the UN's International Day of Peace, she noted that the organisation had been set up with the primary goal of ensuring peace as laid out in the UN Charter. Noting the war in Ukraine, Novák said "it fills us with particular concern, especially because ethnic Hungarians living across the borders also shed their blood." Hungary firmly condemns Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which has caused tremendous suffering and destruction and has serious ramifications for the global order, she said.

Since the start of the conflict, Hungary has stood by the war's victims, Novák said, adding that "the greatest humanitarian action in Hungary's history" was under way, with private individuals, churches, civil groups, municipalities and the

government having provided shelter to some one million people since the outbreak of the war.

"What do we want in the UN? To win the war?" the president said, adding that the aim was to restore peace. Novák also noted Hungary's membership in several organisations besides the UN, such as NATO, the European Union and the Council of Europe. Those organisations were primarily established to serve the cause of peace and "the service of peace is the foundation of their identity", she said. "It is by no means self-evident, that today, at the time of war, energy and food crises, the organisations set up to avoid war and preserve peace are focusing on ideological indoctrination," the president said. Novák quoted the recently deceased Queen Elizabeth II as saying in the UN in 2010 that "the waging of peace is the hardest form of leadership". "Today, on the International Day of Peace, I stand here to urge the world leaders to be faithful to the legacy of Elizabeth II, so that we can live in peace," she said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: CHINESE INVESTMENTS HELPING GROWTH

Large Chinese investments may allow Hungary to maintain growth when Europe appears on the cusp of recession, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said in New York after talks with Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session, according to a

foreign ministry statement. Since Hungary is benefitting greatly from bilateral cooperation built on mutual interests and respect, maintaining that cooperation is in Hungary's national interest, Szijjártó said. China will be the largest investor in Hungary in 2022, as it was in 2020, Szijjártó said, noting Chinese battery maker CATL's recently announced 3,000 billion forint (EUR 7.5bn) investment in eastern Hungary, the largest investment ever in the country.

Szijjártó said that Wang had reassured him that China valued Hungary's stable political-economic status and competitive investment environment. Hungary will therefore encourage Chinese companies to consider the country a European economic bridgehead for further investments. He noted a record volume of bilateral trade last year, adding that its volume had already increased by more than 7% to total 6.5 billion dollars in the first six months of 2022.

Cooperation between Hungary and China has always rested on mutual respect, Szijjártó said, adding that Beijing had never set any political criteria in connection with economic matters. "This is the foundation of mutual trust" between the countries, he said. "Based on this trust, we urge the European Union to maintain a similarly effective and mutually beneficial cooperation with China," Szijjártó said. The Hungarian foreign minister welcomed the relaunch of direct commercial and cargo flights

between the two countries after the coronavirus pandemic. Hungary continues to support the One China principle, Szijjártó said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: UN SHOULD ENSURE PROTECTION TO ETHNIC MINORITIES' IDENTITY

The United Nations should ensure protection to the identity of national minorities, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in New York at a conference on the Declaration of Minority Rights at the United Nations General Assembly. Protecting national identity should be recognised as a fundamental human right at the international level, he said. A statement from the foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying that protection for ethnic minority rights was a central component of Hungary's foreign policy, for which the government was ready to "fight" in international forums. Noting that one third of the Hungarian nation lived in communities outside Hungary, Szijjártó said "the principle of reciprocity should apply in this field", and he called for the rights of ethnic Hungarians to be fully respected "in the same way Hungary treats ethnic minorities living in the country".

Ensuring the rights of ethnic minorities is an international rather than a national responsibility, Szijjártó said, calling for international guarantees that minorities may preserve their identity. He noted that national identity did not always

coincide with citizenship, adding that those belonging to ethnic minorities should "always be considered constituents of the society they live in".

SZIJJÁRTÓ: 'SAVING LIVES NOT TO BE MIXED UP WITH POLITICS'

"Saving human lives must not be mixed up with politics," Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in New York, adding that "some players set that principle aside during the coronavirus pandemic and considered the vaccines as political statements based on their country of origin". A statement from the foreign ministry quoted the minister as saying at a discussion on health care under the auspices of the UN General Assembly that such behaviour was "irresponsible", adding that "political decisions cannot be allowed to cause people to die". Application of various vaccines should be treated as a medical question, while "the country of origin of applications or products must not be the subject of political disputes," Szijjártó said.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said the Hungarian government was committed to the UN's objectives of providing clean drinking water to people globally. In Hungary, he added, everybody has access to clean water. Also, he said differences of health care in each country should not be considered as a legal basis for illegal migration. Hungary has so far received some 1.5 million refugees

from Ukraine, and provided them with the same health services and schooling as its own citizens, Szijjártó said.

NAVRACSICS JOINS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS

Regional Development Minister Tibor Navracsics will sit in parliament as a member of the allied ruling Christian Democrats (KDNP) parliamentary group. Navracsics thanked the KDNP group for unanimously admitting him. Navracsics was Fidesz MP between 2006 and 2014 and after 2022. He was Fidesz's parliamentary group leader between 2006 and 2010.

CIVIL GROUPS SUPPORT NEW ABORTION RULES

Twenty Hungarian civil groups have expressed support for a recent ministerial decree under which abortions are now conditional on the mother listening to the foetus's heartbeat. In a statement, the organisations that are active in efforts to protect foetal life and support pregnant women said "Hungary's pro-life community" unanimously welcomed and supported the decree, adding that "the test, easily performed with modern diagnostic equipment could save the lives of many fellow humans in the foetal phase." Citing experience from other countries, they said: "Such an encounter between mother and baby have changed the mind of a number of desperate mothers..."

The signatories include the Society of Christian Doctors in Hungary, the Association of Large Families and the Hungarian Bioethical Society, while the statement was also signed by Csaba Bőjte, head of the St. Francis Foundation of Deva, Bishop János Székely and neurosurgeon András Csókay.

NMHH: TILOS CULTURAL FOUNDATION WINS BID FOR 90.3 MHZ BROADCASTING FREQUENCY

The Tilos Cultural Foundation has won the tender for a licence to broadcast on the 90.3 MHz frequency, NMHH said on Thursday. The foundation has won a terrestrial broadcasting licence for a period of ten years, the media authority said in a statement. Tilos Rádió's broadcasting licence expired on Sept. 3.

SOME 11,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 6,008 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Wednesday, while another 5,210 from Ukraine crossed from Romania, the national police headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 201 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. Four people arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said.

CJEU: RESTRICTIONS OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION CONCERNING ASYLUM SEEKERS IN CONFLICT WITH EU LAW

Under European Union law, national authorities assessing applications for international protection cannot restrict the applicant's access to the relevant documents by citing a risk to the country's national security posed by the applicant, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled on Thursday, in connection with a case involving Hungary. The case goes back to 2002, when a Hungarian court handed a prison sentence to an asylum seeker for drug abuse. In 2012, the Hungarian authorities granted the defendant refugee status, but that status was withdrawn in 2019. The defendant staying in the country was declared a risk to national security. Whereas he was not expelled, neither was he provided an explanation. In its Thursday ruling, the CJEU condemned national regulations under which access to information serving as a basis to reject an application for asylum or to withdraw asylum status could be denied if access to such information was deemed to pose a security risk. Similarly, stipulations under which the asylum seeker could only

access the requested information subsequently, on application, are against relevant EU directives, the court said, adding that the authorities' failure to communicate their arguments for the negative decision also went against the directive.

HUNGARY GOVT TO CONTINUE BUSINESS SUPPORT IN VOJVODINA

The Hungarian government is firmly committed to pursuing its economic development programme aimed at helping ethnic Hungarian businesses in Serbia's Vojvodina province, though less funding will be available due to current financial pressures on the budget, a state secretary at the foreign ministry said in Subotica (Szabadka) on Thursday.

Levente Magyar, speaking at the opening ceremony of one of two new hotels built with the programme's financing, said that "for the time being funds will not be coming in the magnitude and frequency as before". Referring to the new hotels in Subotica and Novi Sad (Újvidék), Magyar said Hungarian businesses, including those in tourism, had benefited from the scheme and assumed dominant positions in their respective markets. Magyar said the Hungarian government's programme was made possible by excellent bilateral ties with Serbia, and it had now helped tens of thousands of ethnic Hungarian families. Had it not

been for the scheme, many of those people might have sought prosperity outside their homeland, he added. The programme focuses on agriculture, tourism, as well as assistance to small and medium-sized businesses, helping young people stay in Vojvodina and reverse the tendency to emigrate, the state secretary added.

**HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITIES
AGREE TO COOPERATE
ON SUSTAINABILITY**

Fourteen Hungarian universities have signed a framework agreement on forming a sustainability platform to promote environmental protection.

Anikó Raisz, state secretary for environmental protection and the circular economy, praised the initiative as an excellent example of meeting global challenges at local level.

She expressed hope that the number of signatories would soon exceed 60 and that their joint work would yield results even in the short term. Economic growth should go hand in hand with environmental protection, and neither of them should go to the detriment to the other, she said. The Hungarian government has demonstrated its commitment to environmental protection several times, Raisz said. Balázs Hankó, deputy state secretary for higher education, said the energy crisis and the drought have once again underlined that priority should be given to the protection of the global environment, adding that universities had a major role to play in this.

**ENERGY AUTHORITY:
GAS STORAGE FACILITIES
OVER 70% FULL**

Hungary's gas storage facilities are over 70% full, putting the country in the third best position in Europe in terms of the amount of gas stored compared to annual gas consumption, the Hungarian Energy and Public Utility Regulatory Authority (MEKH) said on Thursday. The authority said that on Sept. 19, gas storage facilities were 70.11% full and the total volume of gas stored reached 4.44 billion cubic metres. This amount equals 112.26% of annual residential gas consumption, it added. In terms of the amount of gas stored compared to total annual gas consumption, Hungary stood at 40.55%, behind two countries that also store transit gas: Austria with 72.91% and Slovakia with 53.39%. In line with the schedule included in European Union regulations on gas storage, Hungary must store 35% of its five-year average consumption by November 1, which equals 3.65 billion cubic metres, MEKH said. Owing to fast storage filling in Hungary, it already has 42.57% of the past five year's average consumption stored in underground facilities, it added. "Gas supplies in Hungary are undisturbed and the filling of storage facilities is progressing as normal," the authority said.

**HUNGARY C/A DEFICIT
EUR 2.63 BN IN Q2**

Hungary's current account posted a deficit of 2.63 billion euros in the second quarter of 2022, edging up by 163 million

euros from Q1 figures but jumping by 1.453 billion euros from the same period last year, the National Bank of Hungary (NBH) said in a release of preliminary data on Thursday. Hungary had a 925 billion euro trade deficit for the quarter, the balance of a 2.829 billion euro deficit in trade of goods and a 1.904 billion surplus in trade of services. The primary income balance had a 1.314 billion deficit as investors repatriated 1.464 billion from direct investments. Capital transfers from the European Union came to 874 million euros for the quarter. In Q2 Hungary's seasonally adjusted net financing requirement amounted to 1.411 billion euros, equal to 3.4% of quarterly GDP. The trade balance showed a deficit of 2.366 billion euros, the difference between a deficit of 5.486 billion in trade of goods and a 3.120 billion surplus in trade of services. Capital transfers from the EU came to 2.822 billion euros for H1. Hungary's current account deficit amounted to 6.426 billion euros in 2021.

JOBLESS RATE 3.6% IN AUG

Hungary's jobless rate was at 3.6% in August, edging up from 3.5% in the previous month but down from 4.0% twelve months earlier, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Thursday. The rate covers unemployment among people between the ages of 15 and 74. In absolute terms, 176,700 unemployed were registered, 3,800 more than a month earlier but 17,400 fewer than in August 2021. The rolling three-month average jobless rate stood at 3.4% in

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August, up from 3.3% in July but down by an annual 4.1%.

The monthly jobless rate for the 15- to 64-year-old age group stood at 3.7%, up from 3.5% in the previous month but down from 4.0% a year earlier.

KSH uses the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of jobless which includes people who are without work, people who carried out activities to seek employment in the previous past four weeks, and people who did not look for work but made arrangements for a future job start within two weeks.

KSH noted that data from the National Employment Service (NFSZ) show there were 231,000 registered jobseekers at the end of August, down 9.6% from twelve months earlier. The employment rate for the 15-74 age group reached 64.4% in August, edging up from 64.3 in July and also up from 63.6% twelve months earlier. In absolute terms, there were 4,712,700 employed in August, 1,000 fewer than in July but 34,300 more than twelve months earlier. The number of economically active people in the age group stood at 4,889,400, giving Hungary an activity rate of 66.8%.

Magyar Bankholding senior analyst Gergely Suppan said that so far, the war has not had any negative impact on the domestic labour market, but soaring energy costs could lead to shutdowns in certain sectors in the coming months, which may lead to layoffs. It remains to be seen how much the government's planned job protection programme and the workforce shortage that still exists in

certain areas will be able to offset the negative impact, he added. Suppan put the full-year jobless rate at 3.5% both this year and in 2023.

NUMBER OF CONFIRMED MONKEYPOX CASES REACHES 77

Hungary has so far confirmed 77 cases of monkeypox, with two new infections recorded in the past week, the national public health authority (NNK) said on Thursday. The new patients are males aged 25 and 38, NNK said, adding that none of them required hospitalisation. Local authorities are investigating each recorded case, including contact tracing, NNK said.

SLOVAKIA GUEST OF HONOUR AT BUDAPEST'S 27TH INTL BOOK FESTIVAL

Slovakia is guest of honour at the 27th International Book Festival Budapest to be held from Sept. 29 to Oct. 2 at Budapest's Millenáris Park, organisers told a press conference on Thursday. The event to be held after a two-year hiatus will host 130 exhibitors and 150 programmes, with more than 40 foreign guests attending, Katalin Gál, the head of the Hungarian Publishers' and Booksellers' Association, said. Guest of honour is Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich, a Belarusian investigative journalist, essayist and oral historian, who will also receive the Budapest Grand Prize presented by Budapest's mayor, Gergely Karácsony. The festival

will showcase 29 Slovak books translated into Hungarian and 10 books by Slovak authors writing in Hungarian. It will also host the European Debut Writers Festival on Sept. 30, with young authors from 20 countries expected to attend.

WORLD PRESS PHOTO EXHIBITION OPENS

The World Press Photo exhibition opened on Thursday at the Hungarian National Museum, with nearly 140 press photos showcased from all around the world. The exhibition runs until Oct. 30. This year the images were selected by an international jury from 64,823 photographs by 4,066 photojournalists from 130 countries, László L. Simon, the director of the museum, said.

Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, addressing the opening event, said the photos on display did not necessarily illustrate milestones of human history but captured "irretrievable moments", those that later might turn out to be historic. The exhibition presents many images of social injustice, yet more proof that the world "is becoming a more dangerous place" after a sustained period of peace, he added.

Dutch Ambassador to Budapest, Desirée Bonis, noted that World Press Photo is an independent non-profit organisation, founded in Amsterdam in 1955, and has remained a recognised platform of journalism since then. The ambassador called critical, independent, fact-finding journalism the lifeblood of democracy, adding that the existence of the free press was a touchstone for a country joining the European Union.

