

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/PM's office/Fischer Zoltán
PM Viktor Orbán (R) and Milorad Dodik, Serbian member of the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU interior ministers meet in Luxembourg

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Central Stats Office's presser on national census

Central Stats Office publishes construction industry data for Aug 2022

TOP STORY

WAGE HIKE FOR TEACHERS IN PIPELINE

An "unprecedented" wage hike awaits teachers if the government reaches agreement with the European Commission on EU funding currently withheld due to the rule-of-law conditionality mechanism, the prime minister's chief of staff has said.

The government is hoping to raise teachers' wages to 80% of the average salary of university graduates by 2025, Gergely Gulyás told a regular press briefing. Wages may be raised by 21% in January 2023, by 25% in 2024, and by 29-30% in the two subsequent years, he said. In 2025, the average graduate salary is expected to be around 972,000 forints (EUR 2,253) gross, with teachers likely to earn 778,000 on average, he said, adding that even without EU funding, the government would hike teachers' wages by 10% next year. Meanwhile, the government has agreed with the European Union to take 17 measures, mostly in connection with the public procurement system. The proportion of single-bid procurements will be reduced and cooperation with the European Union's anti-corruption taskforce OLAF intensified, Gulyás said. Orbán on Thursday thanked in a letter the EU leaders for their decision to extend the deadlines, he noted. Hungary is striving for a fair agreement, and the government is totally committed to fulfilling its pledges, he added.

GULYÁS: ENERGY SUPPLIES SECURE

Hungary's energy supply is secure, the prime minister's chief of staff told a news conference. Even if the country received not a single molecule of gas during this period, it still has enough gas stored to last six months, Gergely Gulyás said, adding that Hungary has significant storage capacities and high storage levels, and it has also made significant gas purchases. Skyrocketing energy prices in Europe has triggered inflation and exchange rate problems in Hungary, he said. Europe faces two major challenges: the availability and the price of energy, especially natural gas, Gulyás said. Prices are exorbitantly high and energy is not always and necessarily available from its usual sources, he added. The current crisis has underlined the need to effect several changes in Hungary's energy system, he said.

If the government reaches agreement with the European Commission, Hungary would use the credit part of the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) for the green transition and upgrading its electricity network, he said. Meanwhile, Gulyás said that whereas solar panel installations were feeding the energy into the electricity network, current regulations would have to be changed because the network cannot take in any more energy until a major upgrade is carried out. The requirement to feed the electricity back into the network

will be suspended in the case of new applications for solar panels, he added.

Asked about Orbán's meeting on Monday with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Gulyás said the two leaders discussed EU sanctions against Russia among other matters. The sanctions should be discussed calmly and reviewed in a way that Europe's interests are also taken into consideration, he said. Gulyás argued that rising energy prices triggered by the sanctions and the continuing threat of them had put all European economies in an extremely difficult situation.

Though Hungary has introduced "Europe's biggest utility support scheme", the situation is still "an extremely heavy burden" on the state, and further support schemes will have to be launched, Gulyás said. He added, however, that no other European country could compete with Germany's 200 billion euro plan to shield companies and households from soaring energy prices. Meanwhile, Gulyás said Europe would have to decide which sanctions should be extended when they expire in December.

Meanwhile, commenting on the National Consultation whose questionnaires will be sent to households on Friday, he said the public survey of opinions on sanctions against Russia served as a good example to the rest of Europe. The survey would reveal, he said, how far arguments for sanctions are publicly supported or otherwise.

Regarding EU funding, he said that if an agreement is struck with the European Commission, Hungary may receive its money either at the end of this year or at the start of 2023 at the earliest.

Asked about inflation, Gulyás said the government would pursue a balanced fiscal policy and reduce the trade deficit causing Hungary "the greatest uncertainty". Although the forint has weakened more than the Polish or Czech currencies, Hungary's exposure to the global market is bigger, too, he said, adding that as long as sanctions blew up energy prices, the forint would lose value. Gulyás insisted, however, that Hungary's economic fundamentals were stable. If there were no longer sanctions, the forint would rebound, Gulyás added. Once there is peace and sanctions on energy have been lifted, "we will have no problems with inflation" as there "is no structural factor whatsoever" in the Hungarian economy generating inflation, he said.

Asked about the National Bank of Hungary bank led by György Matolcsy flagging the prospect of ending the series of rate hikes, Gulyás said the government did not comment on central bank policy decisions.

Asked about the EU proposal to impose a cap on the price of gas, he said if the European Commission failed to guarantee a sufficient amount of gas for households and the economy, this would not be a price-cutting measure but a form of sanctions.

Asked about the formation of a multi-party parliamentary group

dealing with LGBTQ rights, Gulyás said: "I envy anyone who believes this to be among the country's top hundred most important issues."

In reply to a question, Gulyás said that Hungary had implemented all EU sanctions involving the freezing of assets.

Asked whether Western arms deliveries had helped Ukrainians in their struggle, Gulyás said they had while also prolonging the war. The great powers would have done better to strive for a resolution before the outbreak of war, he added. Gulyás said Hungary had decided against delivering weapons to Ukraine because such shipments would cross Transcarpathia, and the government, he added, did not want to expose large numbers of ethnic Hungarians living in that relatively peaceful region to danger.

ORBÁN: INTEGRATION OF W BALKANS 'IN EU'S INTEREST'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met Milorad Dodik, the Serbian member of Bosnia-Herzegovina's Presidency and the recently re-elected leader of Bosnian Serbs, in Budapest on Thursday for talks on the EU integration process of Western Balkan countries, as well as economic and energy security issues, the prime minister's press chief told MTI. Orbán congratulated Dodik on his victory in the Bosnian Serb presidential elections, Bertalan Havasi said.

They were in agreement that it was all the more important, amidst the current war and sanctions crisis, for Western Balkan countries to be integrated into the European Union as quickly as possible, and they welcomed the European Commission's official proposal earlier this week on granting Bosnia-Herzegovina candidate status, he said. Orbán and Dodik agreed to develop economic ties between Hungary and the Bosnian Serb community.

Concerning energy, they discussed plans for joint projects that would ease the effects of the energy crisis in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Hungary, and agreed to specify the details in the weeks to come, Havasi said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HOPE FOR PEACE 'LOST' IF WEST-RUSSIA COMMUNICATION CHANNELS DRY UP

If the West and Russia do not engage in talks but instead allow their communications channels to fade, "we are giving up even the hope for peace in the current awful situation", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Moscow on Thursday. According to a ministry statement, Szijjártó told a panel discussion at the Russia Energy Week that though his participation in the event as a European Union and NATO foreign minister was considered "out of the ordinary", Hungary had not given up hope for peace being achieved in its neighbourhood in the shortest possible timeframe. "The situation

is terrible," Szijjártó said. "People are dying and suffering, prices are sky high, inflation is at a record high, and we're facing the first ever general global energy supply crisis." "As we know, the solution to this awful situation can be expressed in a single word, and that is 'peace'," he said, adding that Hungary had condemned the war from the start and urged a ceasefire and peace talks.

Szijjártó said Hungary considered energy cooperation a purely physical matter, rather than an ideological or political one, arguing that "it's impossible to heat homes and cook politically or ideologically." "It is therefore fully in our interest to maintain energy cooperation between Russia and Hungary," Szijjártó said. "We've made it clear that we will not support any form of sanctions that endangered the security of our country's energy supply." The minister underscored the importance of the operation of the TurkStream gas pipeline, saying it was crucial to avoid incidents like the sabotage of the Nord Stream offshore pipeline. National interests determine Hungary's position, not Ukrainian or Russian interests, he said.

On the topic of the green transition, Szijjártó said this was a practical rather than a political matter, and the government sees environmental protection as important to preserving the planet. He said attempts were being made to appropriate the issue, but the more politicised green policymaking was made, the more discredited it became. Environmental

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.



protection must be pursued hand in glove with enhancing economic performance and competitiveness, and this balance must be carefully maintained, he added. "Nuclear energy is clean, safe, cheap and sustainable ... there's never been any doubt about that," the minister said.

Regarding Russia sanctions, Szijjártó said they caused Hungary and Europe "great pain" and they possibly bore the brunt more so than Russia. "Peace is the only solution," he said. Hungary's energy costs came to 7 billion euros last year, he said. This year they will amount to 19 billion euros, while the bill may be 29 billion euros in 2023, he added.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY OIL RESERVES COULD BE REPLENISHED BEFORE YEAR-END

A significant portion of the diesel stock released from Hungary's strategic reserves could be returned to the reserves before the end of the year following a government decision to purchase almost 50 million litres of diesel, the state secretary for energy policy said. Attila Steiner noted that the government in August approved the release of 184 million litres of diesel from strategic reserves with a view to ensuring domestic fuel supply. The freed-up reserves account for 38% of the diesel and 24% of the total diesel and crude stock. Under the current regulations, the strategic reserves have to be replenished by April 1,

2023. To this end, the Hungarian Association for the Stockpiling of Hydrocarbons (MSZKSZ) has called a tender under which 47.8 million litres of diesel could be procured before the end of the year. The remainder of the released stock will be returned to the strategic reserve under further tenders. Hungary has enough fuel in stock to meet residential demand, the ministry said. Thanks to the cap on fuel prices at the pump introduced last November, Hungarians pay the lowest price for fuel in the whole of Europe, it added.

PACE ADOPTS REPORT ON HUNGARY

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on Wednesday voted to place Hungary under a full monitoring procedure, citing long-standing rule-of-law issues. A country report said the issues cited "remained largely unaddressed". "The widespread use of cardinal laws, which require two-thirds majorities, severely restricts political pluralism, which is the hallmark of a democratic system". It added that the current electoral system "does not ensure a level playing field conducive to fair elections". The assembly also raised concerns about Hungary's using a special legal order since 2020 and said it "allows the triggering of a state of danger". Such orders, the assembly said, should be "strictly necessary, proportionate and must be limited in time". The assembly,

at the same time, acknowledged 17 amendments the Hungarian government announced last month, aimed at improving the operations of democratic institutions, increasing transparency and making conflict of interest rules more stringent.

FIDESZ LAWMAKER: PACE BACKS ILLEGAL MIGRATION IN NEW REPORT

A recent Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) report "backs illegal migration", Fidesz Barna Pál Zsigmond said on Thursday in Strasbourg on the sidelines of PACE's autumn session. "Europe's left wing is again talking about taking in illegal migrants," Zsigmond told MTI. The report, Zsigmond said, contained proposals on managing migration and accepting illegal migrants, while failing to address the importance of border protection. He accused the left wing of "attacking Hungary" in view of the country's position that migration should be prevented rather than managed. The government, he said, has enacted measures that help to protect Europe, Hungary and the security of Hungarians.

Hungary is protecting its borders in line with obligations set down in international treaties, he said, adding it maintains its position that Europe must be protected against limitless waves of illegal migrants. War refugees, however, must be provided all possible support, he said.

AZBEJ CALLS FOR AID FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

Persecuted Christians need help to be given in their homelands, while those who have fled their homelands must be helped to return, the state secretary for aiding persecuted Christians said on Thursday in Bratislava at an international conference on the protection of religious freedom. Tristan Azbej told public media that action was necessary at a time when a large part of the world's population lived in countries where the religious freedom of some communities was oppressed. Azbej, who also heads the Hungary Helps programme, said he had briefed at the conference representatives of the Visegrád Group and other countries of Hungary's six-year work in over 50 countries to support persecuted Christian communities. He lamented the "disinterest and denial" Hungary encountered earlier when seeking cooperation with other countries. "While over 300 million people are discriminated against because of their Christian faith worldwide, Western liberal politicians try to deny that fact," he said, pointing to the killing of some 50 people at a Nigerian Catholic church

this year. While Hungary sent swift aid, "leading western politicians and European Union leaders said it shouldn't be seen as religious persecution but as a consequence of climate change," he said. "Putting aside politically correct considerations," Hungary works directly with local churches and religious organisations, and so far has helped more than 500,000 people worldwide, he said. The initiative is gaining followers in the Visegrád Group, and cooperation has already started Slovenia too, he said.

AROUND 10,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 5,708 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Wednesday, while another 4,561 crossed from Romania, the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued temporary residence permits valid for thirty days to 223 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. Budapest received 81 people, 36 children among them, by train, ORFK said.

POTAPI: REMOVAL OF MUKACHEVO CASTLE HUNGARIAN TURUL STATUE 'OUTRAGEOUS'

The local council's decision on Thursday to remove the statue of a turul bird from the Mukachevo (Munkács) Castle in western Ukraine is "shocking" and "outrageous", Árpád János Potápi, the state secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad at the prime minister's office, said in a statement. The turul statue was erected in the castle in 1896 and re-installed in 2008 after the castle's renovation. Potápi called it "regrettable" that "in the midst a war, the most important thing for Mukachevo's leaders is to dismantle a primary symbol of the local Hungarian community and Transcarpathian Hungarians". Countries that abide by European values should respect and preserve historic monuments, he said, adding this was a part of minority policy. News portal mukachevo.net said the Ukrainian coat-of-arms would replace the statue.