

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Balázs Mohai

Christmas Fair opens at St Stephen's Basilica

UPCOMING EVENTS

EP session

Plenary session of parl

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

PRESIDENT DISCUSSES IMPORTANCE OF PEACE WITH ISRAELI PM

Hungarian President Katalin Novák said on Friday that she had discussed the importance of peace with outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in Tel-Aviv.

"I met with outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in Tel Aviv. We could exchange a few words in Hungarian as well, as he is of Hungarian origin on both his mother's and father's side. We talked about defence industrial cooperation and also about how important it is for us Hungarians to preserve peace in our country," Novák said in an English-language post on Facebook. "For us Christians, Israel is the Holy Land, the Promised Land," she said. "In Jerusalem, I met with the leaders of local Christian churches as well," she added. "Few people know that Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world today," she said. Hungary's efforts to help persecuted Christians are recognised all over the world, she added, and expressed thanks for the opportunity to discuss the difficulties and ways to cope with them.

During her two-day visit to Israel, the Hungarian president met Israeli counterpart Isaac Herzog, as well as Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu.

In Jerusalem, she visited the Yad Vashem Institute and the Holocaust memorial centre.

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GULYÁS AT CPAC: HUNGARY A 'HOPE OF CONSERVATIVES IN FREE WORLD'

Hungary has become "the hope of conservatives in the free world," Gergely Gulyás, the prime minister's chief of staff, told the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Mexico City, his office told MTI on Sunday. In his address, Gulyás said Hungarians will never forget where they come from and where their roots are. This means, Gulyás said that "the core values of conservatism: individual freedom, the rule of law, fiscal responsibility, free markets, a Christian heritage and human dignity must be respected". He said "the world's leading mainstream media platforms dedicate much more significant coverage to Hungary than to even ten times bigger countries". Gulyás said the liberal media put Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the same page with Donald Trump, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Jair Bolsonaro or Benjamin Netanyahu.

"Of course, there are huge differences between countries and leaders, but really why Hungary, a country with our size is such important as the biggest players of world politics? Why are our opponents trying to destroy and exclude us from the political arena with the same anger as the conservative president of Brazil or the former president of the world's strongest power, the United States of America?". "The answer is simple:

Hungary has become the hope of conservatives in the free world. It is the proof that the conservative experiment can be successful," Gulyás said, adding that "reliable" and "truthful information" about Hungary could pose a serious risk for leftist and progressive liberals "because others would start to follow our example". Gulyás said despite of all the accusations, Hungary is a successful country. It has over one million more people holding a job than ten years ago and is performing one of Europe's highest rates of economic growth. Wages have increased at a much faster pace than ever in the previous years and the volume of Hungary's exports is breaking records every year, Gulyás said, adding that the country is an attractive destination for foreign investors. He said Hungary spent 5% of its GDP on family assistance, "three times as much as in 2010".

"Our opponents think ... those who believe people are born either men or women are enemies of freedom. They think anyone who believes marriage can only be established between a man and a woman is an enemy of the rule of law. They think those who believe a state exists as long as it is ready to defend its borders do not respect fundamental rights," Gulyás said. "They think those who believe migration without integration is a danger to society annul human dignity," he said. "They think those who believe in the importance of conservative media alongside mainstream-liberal ones, are against

the freedom of press ... That is why we say progressive liberalism, although once in the 19th century did a lot for freedom, nowadays have become the greatest enemy of freedom. Today, progressive liberalism means political correctness, restricting freedom of speech and religious freedom, and its main characteristics are intolerance and disregard towards the free will of the electorate," Gulyás said.

According to Gulyás, Hungary's conservatives "have demonstrated more than anyone else, their clear commitment to freedom and democracy. Today, in the free world everyone talks about the importance of freedom, democracy and the rule of law in terms of having lived their whole lives in freedom, democracy and the rule of law. Meanwhile Hungary is one of the few exceptions, whose conservative leaders were committed to freedom, democracy and the rule of law even during the communist dictatorship," Gulyás said. Closing his speech, Gulyás invited participants to attend CPAC's next conference to be held in Budapest next May.

DEPUTY PM ANNOUNCES MULTI-FOLD INCREASE IN EDUCATION SUPPORT TO ETHNIC HUNGARIANS ABROAD

The Hungarian government is introducing a radical, multi-fold increase in education support for ethnic Hungarians beyond the borders, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén

said on Friday. Semjén told a meeting of the Permanent Hungarian Conference (MÁÉRT) in Budapest that ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia will get the increased support immediately, and in other areas it will be introduced from the next academic year. The current amount of support paid is 22,400 forints (EUR 55) per child and per academic year. Support to Transcarpathia will be generally increased “because they are in the most difficult situation”, Semjén said. All participants at MÁÉRT signed a closing statement but three opposition parties, the Democratic Coalition, Párbeszéd and Momentum, stayed away from the event. “Those that stayed away did not belittle the government and MÁÉRT but ethnic Hungarians beyond the borders,” he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: BMW’S DEBRECEN PLANT ‘ABOUT MORE THAN ORIGINALLY ANNOUNCED’

A new announcement can be expected next week in connection with the BMW plant being built in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said in Munich on Friday, adding that the project would be “about more than what was originally planned”. BMW’s investment in Debrecen will be a “success story” of the Hungarian economy, the foreign ministry cited Péter Szijjártó as saying. The German carmaker is building a plant in Hungary that will completely

combine environmental protection with competitiveness, Szijjártó said. “This plant will be what industry will look like over the coming decades,” the minister said. “Hungary and Debrecen together with BMW will show the world something that will only become commonplace in the global economy over the coming decades.” The Debrecen plant won’t just be one of the most cutting-edge plants in Europe, but also in the entire world, he said, noting that the carmaker will build its first full platform for electric models at the east Hungarian factory. Szijjártó said the European economy was heading towards a severe recession due to the war in Ukraine and the related sanctions, adding that Hungary’s only goal could be to avoid the economic downturn. “This isn’t an easy task, but it’s possible and there’s a clear recipe for it, which is maintaining the increasing rate of investments coming into Hungary, in which Bavarian businesses play a key role,” Szijjártó said. “Because it’s investments that create jobs, and jobs generate output, which generates economic growth,” he said. “And if economic growth is maintained, we can avoid the recession and won’t have to expect negative economic consequences which we unfortunately already saw in Europe as a result of the pandemic.” Szijjártó met Florian Herrmann, head of the Bavarian State Chancellery, Melanie Huml, the minister for European and international affairs, as well as leaders of the BMW Group, Knorr-Bremse and Schaeffler, among others, in Munich.

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER: IF THERE IS AGREEMENT ON HUNGARIAN RRF, EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORMS WILL BE OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE

If there is agreement on the Hungarian recovery and resilience facility (RRF), vigorous and effective implementation of the reforms will be of utmost importance, European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders said on Friday.

Reynders told a press conference after the meeting of the General Affairs Council in Brussels that the EU still had concerns about judicial independence in Hungary and it was therefore important that the Hungarian government should address this area. He added that talks with Justice Minister Judit Varga had been held in a very constructive way and “we made the maximum use of these discussions to protect the Hungarian judiciary from any political interferences.”

“What this overall picture tells us is that there are still a number of very important concerns covering many key aspects of the rule of law,” Reynders said. “What is important is that channels of communication stay open,” he said, adding that the commission was “always available and open to engage in dialogue with the Hungarian authorities”.

Czech Minister for European Affairs Mikuláš Bek, representing the current presidency of the EU, told the press conference that Friday’s debate on the



rule of law situation in Hungary was “a signal for some member states that there is some progress on the Hungarian side”, while others still had reservations.

JUSTICE MINISTER ADDRESSES C EUROPEAN PUBLIC NOTARIES’ CONFERENCE

Public notaries are instrumental in settling legal disputes outside the law court, Justice Minister Judit Varga said in her closing address at the 33rd conference of central European public notaries in Budapest on Saturday. The minister noted that public notaries’ services are “independent, impartial, and professional”, aimed at settling disputes “in a civilised way, by way of the law, understanding, consideration, and documents” she said. Varga said Hungary’s public notaries are in the European forefront in terms of digitalisation, adding that some of their procedures had been made fully electronic a decade ago.

JOBBIK: ‘FUTURE OF HUF 9,000 BN WORTH OF EU FUNDS FOR HUNGARY AT STAKE’

The possibility for Hungary to access EU funds worth 9,000 billion forints (EUR 22bn) depends on how effectively the newly established Integrity Authority works, the leader of the opposition Jobbik party said on Saturday. Established to wipe out graft in Hungary, the authority

started operating on Saturday, Márton Gyöngyösi told a press conference. Setting up the authority was one of the 17 measures the Hungarian government had promised to the European Commission in a bid to access 3,000 billion forints in cohesion funding and another 6,000 billion forints available for boosting the economy, said Gyöngyösi, an MEP. “Jobbik wants to help the Integrity Authority’s work from day one,” he said, adding that the party had information about “several corruption cases involving EU support”. Gyöngyösi said it was also in the opposition party’s interest that Hungary could access the EU funds as soon as possible because “no less is at stake but whether Hungary can maintain its solvency”.

DK SLAMS GOVT FOR HIGH INFLATION

“Prime Minister Orbán’s inflation is causing the people increasing suffering,” the shadow finance minister of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) told a press conference on Saturday. Zoltán Bodnár insisted that shops were “full of desperate buyers” while “many are dreading to receive their utility bills”. He said food prices had increased by 40% since last year, and insisted that “such inflation has not hit Hungary since the (communist) Rákosi era” of the early 1950s. Bodnár said the government was “profiteering” through “Europe’s highest, 27%, VAT on the misery of the Hungarian people”. Orbán’s claim that price caps will rein in inflation “is a lie”, he said, and

insisted that introducing further caps was not more than “eyewash” and would but further increase inflation. “Immediate measures are needed to stop Orbán’s disastrous inflation.” Bodnár demanded that the VAT on basic food products should be reduced to nil at present, than it could be increased to 5% in April. The VAT on household gas and electricity should also be reduced to 5%, he said. The government’s utility subsidies should be rolled out to all SMEs, while such highly profitable businesses as “casinos owned by businesspeople close to the government” should be taxed, Bodnár said. He also proposed that a target date should be set for the introduction of the euro in the interest of stabilising the forint’s exchange rate.

PROTESTERS IN BUDAPEST DEMAND WAGE INCREASE, REFORMS IN EDUCATION

Teachers, students and parents held a protest march in Budapest on Friday evening demanding a wage increase for teachers and reforms in education. The march was organised by members of the youth organisation United Students Front and it started from March 15 Square as a continuation of the “live chain” protest held earlier in the day. The participants crossed Elisabeth Bridge and marched to Clark Adam Square with police escort. Those in the front were carrying a banner that read “We are with our teachers” and chanted slogans including “No future without teachers”, “Strike is a basic right”, “We’ve had enough”, “Free country,

free education” and “Silence is not order”. Speakers addressing the crowd were students, stating that it was not sufficient to demand wage increase, but an education reform was also needed. They demanded that students’ financial circumstances should not influence the quality of education they can access. They said they had already called on the public media to prepare news reports about their actions and give them a chance to express their views on television, and held a minute of silence as an expression of dissatisfaction. The demands of the United Students Front were presented, including finding a solution to the problem of the teacher shortage, introducing changes to the curriculum, better conditions in schools, “paying attention to education”, restoring the right to strike and putting an end to segregation in schools. Following the speeches, a performance was presented to the participants which involved play money being thrown around, as an illustration of money being wasted by the government on unnecessary projects instead of being spent on education.

HUNGARIAN EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP BECOMES REGISTERED CHURCH

The Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (MET) led by pastor Gábor Iványi has been registered as a church following a court’s rejection of a prosecutor’s appeal, the church said on Friday. The ruling does not mean, however, that MET has regained its past legal status, the church said in a statement, explaining that this would

require an agreement with the Hungarian state. The statement noted that MET lost its status following the enactment of the 2011 law on the legal status of churches and religious denominations. The organisation eventually turned to the European Court of Human Rights, which ordered the Hungarian government to pay compensation to MET. In 2013, Hungary’s Constitutional Court ruled that the MET had been stripped of its legal status in a manner that was unconstitutional and ordered the state to restore its church status. MET said that though this ruling remained valid to this day, the government had continually ignored it and was preventing it from being enforced. After more than 90,000 taxpayers opted to donate one percent of their income tax to MET over the last two years, “the court had no choice but to register” MET and then declare it a church in spite of an attempted appeal by the prosecutor’s office, the statement said. The next step, however, requires that the state sign an agreement with MET mandating the organisation’s performance of its public duties, which must then be approved by parliament, they added. MET said it had sent a letter to Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén in the matter but had yet to receive a reply.

TÁLLAI: LEFT’S TAX PROPOSALS COULD COMPROMISE UTILITY CAP SCHEME, FAMILY ASSISTANCE

The opposition Socialists’ three amendment proposals submitted to

the government’s amendment to the tax laws would “punch a hole of 800 billion forints (EUR 1.97bn) in the central budget”, deputy finance minister András Tállai told MTI on Sunday. The proposals, if passed into law, could compromise the government’s programme of capping household utilities, maintaining the family support system and preserving the real value of pensions, Tállai said. According to Tállai, the leftist parties would “hand out funds irresponsibly, missing the target, and it would destroy a well-functioning tax system which contains incentives for employment”. Concerning the actual proposals, Tállai said one of them was aimed at scrapping tax refunds, which ran contrary to the government’s aim of “levying the lowest possible taxes on revenues gained through work”. Referring to the proposal aimed at reducing the VAT on gas and electricity, Tállai said “VAT cuts are an extremely expensive and less effective tool of redistribution”, while the government seeks to protect families through the utility cap scheme and businesses through direct subsidies against “sanctions-generated energy price hikes”. “We will protect the tax cuts and the family subsidies despite the current crisis caused by sanctions,” he said. Referring to Eurostat figures, Tállai said Hungary had implemented the greatest tax cuts in the European Union last year. While in most countries the taxes went up, Hungary had reduced the tax burden to 34% of GDP, as against the EU average of nearly 42%, he said.

FINANCE MINISTRY: IMF ACKNOWLEDGES RESULTS OF DISCIPLINED FISCAL POLICY

The International Monetary Fund acknowledged the results of the fiscal discipline exercised by the Hungarian government, in a concluding statement after an official staff visit to the country this month, the finance ministry said on Friday. The IMF's latest forecast puts Hungary's GDP growth at around 5% for 2022, making it one of the fastest-growing economies in the region, the ministry said in a statement. It also projects that inflation could decelerate to single digits by the end of 2023, the ministry added. The budget deficit could fall to 3.5% of GDP next year, which would contribute to keeping debt on a downward path, the ministry cited the IMF as saying. The IMF also acknowledged the government's measures to ensure the security of the country's gas supply, adding that diversification away from Russian gas will take time, the ministry said. Meanwhile, Hungary's central bank said the IMF had acknowledged that it had responded to inflation appropriately by significantly tightening monetary policy since June 2021. In its statement, the IMF said it was crucial to maintain

a consistently tight and credible fiscal and monetary policy in order to tackle inflation and reduce vulnerabilities from economic imbalances. As the Hungarian economy was recovering from the Covid crisis, it experienced a series of shocks which included supply-chain disruptions, rising energy and commodity prices, the Russia-Ukraine war and a drought, the IMF said. These shocks together with strong domestic demand contributed to a sharp rise in inflation and a current account deficit, it added. But the central bank responded appropriately by significantly tightening monetary policy, the IMF said. This included raising the base rate, tightening liquidity and the measures introduced last month, the NBH said. It cited the IMF as saying that a tight monetary policy should remain in place "until inflationary pressures clearly and sustainably ease". The IMF also emphasised the need to maintain a tight fiscal and monetary policy mix in response to the high economic certainty.

UKRAINE CRISIS - NEARLY 10,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON SATURDAY

Fully 5,302 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine

on Saturday, while another 4,557 crossed from Romania, the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued 30-day residency permits to 163 people, ORFK told MTI on Sunday. Budapest received 154 people, 57 children among them, by train, ORFK said.

SYRIAN MAN ARRESTED FOR ATTACKING POLICE IN GUARDED SHELTER

A district court in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, has ordered the arrest of a Syrian man for allegedly attacking a policeman at a guarded shelter for foreigners in immigration detention. The man aged 28 allegedly headbutted the policeman and hit him with his fist without any apparent reason, causing bruises and a chipped tooth, the statement said. His arrest was ordered because he holds no job in Hungary, has no local income and no residence permit, therefore there is good reason to assume that he would become unreachable if allowed to stay at large. The man was already the subject of a criminal procedure involving vigilante justice which he had committed at the same guarded shelter in October.

