

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Festive lighting in central Szeged on 2nd Sunday of Advent

MTV/Tibor Rosta

UPCOMING EVENTS

Orbán at EU-Western Balkans summit

Parliament holds plenary session

Stats office prelim report on commercial lodgings in Oct 2022

TOP STORY

ORBÁN ATTENDS EU-W BALKANS SUMMIT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is scheduled to participate in the EU-Western Balkans summit.

Orbán left for Tirana, the capital of Albania, on Monday afternoon. According to information from the European Council, this will be the first ever summit between EU and Western Balkan leaders to take place in the Western Balkan region. "The summit is an opportunity to reconfirm the key importance of strategic partnership between the EU and the Western Balkans, a region with a clear EU perspective," the Council said on its website. The main topics of discussion will be "tackling together the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, intensifying political and policy engagement, reinforcing security and building resilience against foreign interference, and addressing the challenges posed by migration, the fight against terrorism and organised crime", it added. Leaders are expected to issue a declaration at the end of the summit, the website said.

VÁRHELYI: W BALKANS TO BE 'ENERGY GATEWAY' TO EUROPE

The Western Balkans could become Europe's "new energy gateway", a region through which the EU could have supplies "via new routes, from different sources and in a much more reliable way", Olivér Várhelyi, EU commissioner for neighbourhood policy and enlargement, told the Hungarian parliament's European affairs committee on Monday. Referring to an upcoming Western Balkans-EU summit in Tirana, Várhelyi said the selection of the venue "clearly indicates that enlargement has become one of three top priorities for the EU". "Stability, security, and prosperity in Europe cannot be ensured without enlargement," the commissioner said, adding that Europe could neither compete globally nor protect its regional geopolitical interests without fully integrating the Western Balkans. Várhelyi said the enlargement process could be accelerated if "the great challenges facing the Western Balkans and Europe simultaneously are addressed in cooperation, whether it is the energy crisis or migration".

Concerning energy, he noted a new European proposal to spend 2.5 billion euros on building a completely new energy network in the region.

On the subject of migration, Várhelyi said the number of illegal migrants had increased in the Western Balkans, reaching 2016 levels. "It is clear that the Balkans cannot cope with the situation alone and the trend could destabilise the region without European assistance," he said adding that the EU is providing the region with 350 million euros to fight illegal migration, and an additional 70 million euros to finance efforts to combat human smuggling and organised crime as well as a contribution towards border controls. Long-term peace and stability in Europe is not possible without enlargement, Várhelyi said, adding that the Ukraine war had added uncertainty to the situation.

Among tasks linked to integrating the Western Balkans the commissioner mentioned developing trade routes, road and rail developments, as well as building an IT infrastructure. He noted that the region was "Europe's most air-polluting" and said that replacing coal plants with gas-operated generators could reduce pollution by 65%. More and "reliable" energy sources, new gas sources and gas transportation routes are needed to reduce and eventually eliminate "the influence of Russian gas", he said. The commissioner also called for investments in education to prevent young people from leaving the Western Balkans, as well as efforts to integrate the Roma

minority, including schools for their children and jobs for their parents.

Várhelyi also addressed the subject of the candidacy of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, noting that the European Commission issues reports on the candidate countries each year. He said it was clear that the candidate members "have a long way to go" before meeting accession criteria.

FIDESZ MPS PROPOSE RESOLUTION TO DENOUNCE 'POLITICAL PRESSURE' AGAINST HUNGARY

Deputies of ruling Fidesz have proposed a parliamentary resolution rejecting "political pressure opposing Hungary's interests", in connection with recent decrees by Germany's Bundestag and the Dutch parliament, relating to the Hungarian government's negotiations with the European Commission on EU funds for Hungary. The proposed resolution would confirm Hungary's commitment to the EU's fundamental values and protection of its finances, noting that the Hungarian government has recently "made and fulfilled" 17 actual commitments. Signatories to the draft regretted that the parliaments of "some" member states would "leave the regulated framework of EU negotiations conducted between certain players" and "resort to exerting political pressure". They also

noted that the European Commission cannot “take instructions from the institutions of member states or other agencies”. They also said EU law “clearly defines the procedural regulations and indicates the EU agencies through which the compliance of member states with requirements to access EU funds could be evaluated” and added that “Germany or the Netherlands do not have such powers”.

By adopting the statement, the Hungarian parliament “has rejected blackmail by Germany and the Netherlands”, they said. Just as Hungary’s national assembly “does not interfere with the life of the German and Dutch people, the legislation and other institutions of the two countries are expected to do the same”, the MPs said.

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) said it would not support the resolution. Deputy group leader Gergely Arató told an online press conference that the German and Dutch decrees had said Hungary was not governed by the rule of law, and “the Orbán government is not seeking to eliminate graft, but to continue to use EU funds in a corrupt way.” “Neither the Dutch nor the Germans are responsible for the fact that the government has been stealing EU funds for the past 12 years; as they are not going to be responsible either for that fact that Hungary will most likely lose a significant amount of EU funding,” he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA BENEFIT FROM COOPERATION

Hungary and Slovakia both highly benefit from bilateral cooperation, and their reliable partnership is behind their ability to tackle current problems, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Bratislava on Monday. Speaking at joint press conference with Rastislav Káčer, his Slovak counterpart, Szijjártó said that when Europe faces serious challenges, predictable, reliable and good neighbourly relations are highly valued. “Hungary and Slovakia have built a predictable and reliable partnership which helps both countries in tackling the security, economic and energy supply difficulties more successfully,” he said.

Szijjártó called both countries reliable NATO partners, noting that Slovakia has contributed several dozen police units to help protect the Hungarian-Serbian border, which he said was “under siege”. At that section, authorities have so far stopped 255,000 illegal migrants this year, he said. “Your own Slovak police officers can now see first-hand how incredibly aggressive the migrants and people smugglers are,” said Szijjártó.

In terms of economic cooperation, Szijjártó said Slovakia is Hungary’s second most important trading partner, with a record volume of over 13 billion euros worth of bilateral trade reached last year. This year has seen

an increase of 43%, he said. In a bid to further develop infrastructure ties, three additional bridges are slated to be completed over the Ipoly River next year. There will also be a road construction project completed and a ferry service launched in 2023, allowing border crossings at another five spots, Szijjártó said.

The Hungarian foreign minister welcomed the European Commission’s approval of a 135 million euro joint programme on cross-border development projects under the EU’s current seven-year financial framework.

Speaking about energy cooperation, Szijjártó called the decision to connect the two countries’ gas pipeline and electricity networks “the right and very good strategic decision”. As cross-border capacity has increased by 150%, electricity has become the most important commodity imported from Slovakia by Hungary, he said. Further, he said that by connecting the two countries’ gas networks, an important corridor had been created along the north-south transit route. Hungary is ready to increase gas supplies to Slovakia via the interconnector from the current MT annual 1.75 billion cubic metres to 5.2 billion in future, Szijjártó added. He called close cooperation in nuclear energy mutually beneficial, adding that both countries were working on increasing their capacity in an effort to boost their energy security.

Asked about disputed issues between the two countries, Szijjártó said that those had been addressed at meetings held by the mixed minority

affairs committee this year. "We have reached an agreement on most of those issues, with very few exceptions," he said, adding that the co-chairs of the committee would soon meet again.

FINMIN IN REPLY TO MATOLCSY: ECONOMIC WOES NOT ONLY AFFECTING HUNGARY

The governor of Hungary's central bank is correct in identifying a problem with the economy, Mihály Varga, the finance minister, said on Monday, reacting to a briefing that György Matolcsy gave to a parliamentary committee. But the problem of high energy prices is not singular to Hungary, he added. High energy prices are tipping all European economies towards recession, Varga said on Facebook.

At the hearing of parliament's economic committee on Monday, the governor blamed the government's economic policy for the country's vulnerable situation. Lawmakers on Monday related some of the contents of Matolcsy's briefing.

Opposition Democratic Coalition MP László Varju cited Matolcsy as saying that after 2021 Hungary would be among the five most vulnerable countries in the world. Further, inflation would be between 14 and 18% in 2023, he said, adding that there was no longer coherence between the government's economic policy and the central bank.

In his response, Varga said all countries had been forced into crisis management, not only Hungary. Yet the country's economic growth rate is robust at 4.1% in the third quarter, the seventh highest rate in the EU, while its employment rate is similarly healthy and the jobless rate is still below 4%, the minister said, adding that it would be possible to build on the results of the past years.

AGRICULTURE MINISTER GREETES 11TH AGRICULTURE FORUM FOR CARPATHIAN BASIN

Agriculture Minister István Nagy on Monday greeted the 11th Cooperation Forum of the Carpathian Basin, an event organised in Budapest for agricultural professionals in the region, and said that the joint efforts of the past 12 years had successfully crossed the "borders between the nation's regions". The forum helps professionals to build networks and evaluate the sector's possibilities together, he said.

Last year's historic drought, the war in Ukraine and the sanctions, sky rocketing energy and produce prices will continue to weigh on the resources, Nagy said. Hungary's government has been supporting farmers across the borders with tenders and other programmes facilitating knowledge exchange and a strong cooperation between entrepreneurs in Hungary and across the borders, Nagy said. "All those

with a minimal understanding of economic processes and willing to take off their blinders will understand that economic success of Hungarians and the Carpathian Basin will also serve neighbouring countries well, and improve competitiveness," he said.

János Árpád Potápi, the state secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad, said that the Hungarian parliament passed a law on dual citizenship on May 26 in 2010, starting "a peaceful reunification of the Hungarian nation within the confines of the current borders". Under the law, 1,170,000 people have so far been granted Hungarian citizenship.

Potápi said the government's policy for Hungarians abroad focused on creating the legal framework for their support during the 2010-2014 period. Later on, the focus shifted to supporting Hungarian communities economically and financially to help them thrive in their homeland, he said.

Hungarian institutions have also been strengthened in the Carpathian Basin, he said, adding that programmes supporting Hungarian communities abroad would be continued and broadened next year.

UNION ALLIANCE MASZSZ PROPOSES 15% PENSION INCREASE

Trade union alliance MASZSZ has demanded a 15% pension increase from January and a one-time payment of 50,000 forints for pensioners receiving less than 160,000 forints

(EUR 391) per month. MASZSZ leader Róbert Zlati said the government's calculation of a 4.5% pension hike for 2023 had been "either deliberately wrong or grossly incorrect". The raise should have come to 6.1%, he said. After consulting experts, the alliance is demanding a 15% increase from next January, to keep abreast of inflation, he said. Low-income pensioners will need a one-time subsidy because "Hungary has seen the fastest food price hikes in the European Union, burdening pensioners at a time when utility costs are also growing drastically," Zlati said.

RETAIL SALES EDGE UP BY 0.6% IN OCT

Retail sales growth in Hungary slowed to an annual 0.6% in October, propped up by sales of motor fuel, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Adjusted for calendar-year effects, retail sales grew at the same pace. Adjusted food sales fell by 5.6% in October and non-food sales edged down by 0.9%, while motor fuel sales climbed 19.7%. In absolute terms, retail sales came to 1,520 billion forints (EUR 3.7bn). Food sales accounted for 46% of the total, non-food sales for 36% and sales at petrol stations for 18%. Retail sales growth has slowed every month since April.

BANKING SECTOR EARNINGS FALL 12% IN Q1-Q3

Combined after-tax profit of Hungarian banks fell by an annual 12.4% to 562 billion forints in Q1-Q3 as write-downs and provisions weighed, the National Bank of Hungary (NBH) said. The sector's net interest revenue climbed 45.2% to 1,739 billion forints and net revenue from commissions and fees increased 22.7% to 834 billion. Write-downs and provisions came to 379 billion, up 298.7% from the base period.

The NBH acknowledged the impact of the consequences of the war in Ukraine on the figure and said a single, large-scale banking group with "significant foreign exposure" accounted for about two-thirds of net write-downs and provisions.

Operating costs increased by 32.4% to 1,618 billion forints, boosted by a windfall profit tax. Total assets of the sector stood at 82,710 billion at the end of September, up 23.8% from twelve months earlier. Lending stock rose by 25.1% to 52,371 billion forints. Stock of deposits increased by 22.2% to 66,218 billion.

AIR POLLUTION HIGH IN NE HUNGARY

Air quality is dangerous in Sajószentpéter, Kazincbarcika and Putnok, in north-east Hungary, due to a high concentration of airborne particles, the National Public Health Centre (NNK) said on Monday. NNK declared air quality to be "unhealthy" in Miskolc too. Concentrations of particles are also considered to be too high in twelve other localities, including Budapest, Székesfehérvár, Kecskemét, Szeged, Debrecen and Nyíregyháza, NNK said. Forecasts show air quality is expected to improve thanks to a front bringing rain on Tuesday.

ALMOST 9,000 REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM UKRAINE ON SUNDAY

Fully 5,206 people crossed into Hungary directly from Ukraine on Sunday, while another 3,538 crossed from Romania, the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) said. Police issued 30-day residency permits to 181 people, ORFK told MTI on Monday. Budapest received 150 people, 32 children among them, who travelled by train, ORFK said.