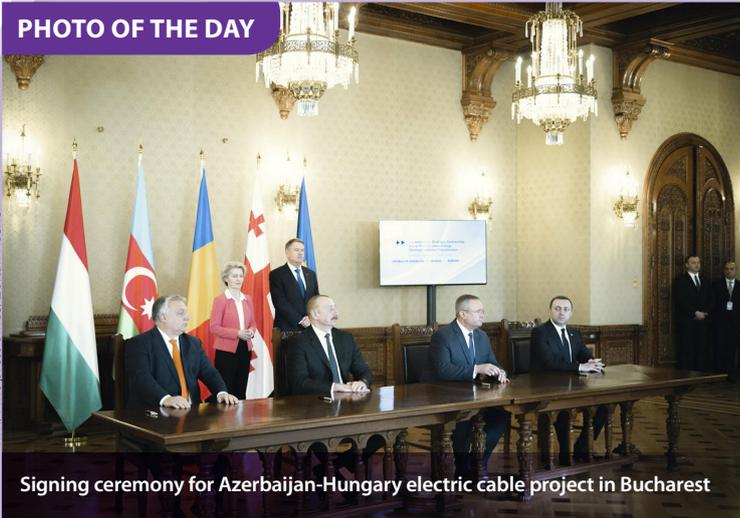


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/PM's press office/Zoltán Fischer

Signing ceremony for Azerbaijan-Hungary electric cable project in Bucharest

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU energy ministers meet in Brussels

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Stats office publishes demography figures for Nov. 2022

TOP STORY

ORBÁN HAILS AGREEMENT ON AZERBAIJAN-HUNGARY ELECTRIC CABLE

Hungary and its partners have made a commitment to a unique project, the construction of the world's longest submarine cable to deliver electricity from Azerbaijan via Georgia and Romania to Hungary, the prime minister said ahead of the signing ceremony of an agreement.

The EU is in a "strategic vacuum", in which the leaders of member states need to ensure energy and economic security for their countries through identifying and securing new energy sources, Viktor Orbán said in Bucharest on Saturday. He said that energy sources in the Caspian region were "within a reasonable distance" and the cable project would provide an "innovative solution" for their exploitation. The cable, delivering Azerbaijan's electricity generated mostly from wind and solar energy, will be 1,195 kms long and completed with an optic internet cable linking Romania and Georgia.

Orbán signed the deal with his Romanian and Georgian counterparts and the president of Azerbaijan with the EC's head attending. Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said the new cable would have a capacity of 3 GWs, and "break a world record in terms of its length". A feasibility study is set to be completed by late 2023 and construction will then "theoretically" take another three to four years, he said. He welcomed that the EC regarded the project as an investment of common interest and allocated 2.3 bn euros for it.

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ORBÁN: SITUATION IN EUROPE 'CHAOTIC'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in Bucharest that the situation in Europe "has never been as chaotic in the records of history". He pointed to the war in Ukraine, a serious energy crisis with soaring prices and supply shortages. He said inflation was also hitting the European economy, while "the leaders of Europe have decided to separate the Russian and European economies, and the United States has in the meantime introduced a series of unprecedented market protection measures which are also hitting Europe". "An epoch in the history of the European economy of importing cheap raw materials and energy from Russia is over; we used to provide western technologies in turn and it yielded economic growth and military security for both sides," Orbán said. "There is no new strategy, that is why we have a strategic vacuum," he added.

On another subject, Orbán noted the EU's increased attention paid recently to Azerbaijan, adding that President Ilham Aliyev had also been open to cooperation. "My decade-long experience is that the EU can always count on Azerbaijan as a reliable partner," he said. Orbán said Romania had made a "tremendous progress" since his last visit eight years ago, adding that the improvement

would justify Romania's Schengen integration. But, he said, "we made an ill-advised decision in the EU the other day". That decision should be "corrected" and Romania included in the Schengen area, Orbán said, adding that Hungary would support Romania's endeavours.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: PROGRESSIVE LIBERALISM 'NOT ONLY PATH'

The liberal mainstream cannot accept that "progressive liberalism is not the only progressive direction," Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in a podcast on Sunday. Hungary has had a "patriotic, Christian Democratic, anti-mainstream and non-progressive government in office over the past twelve and a half years, which, in addition, is successful, which the liberal mainstream cannot digest", he told Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications and relations, in The Bold Truth about Hungary podcast. "As long as we break investment records each year, with firms coming from countries with which we are on explicitly bad political terms to invest billions of euros here, we are safe," Szijjártó said. Business people will make important decisions based on facts "rather than on the basis of what foreign papers write about the Hungarian government",

he said. Szijjártó insisted that Hungary's economic and political positions were "extremely strong" in countries outside Europe. He said the government had "never discriminated between investors" as long as they observed Hungarian laws. He mentioned as an example China's Huawei "the presence of which company in Hungary was much criticised, but at the installation in Budapest of the 5G system operated by Vodafone, a non-eastern company, it turned out that the required infrastructure had been built by Huawei".

Referring to the war in Ukraine, Szijjártó said "the era of cheap Russian gas in Europe is clearly over", with ties severed between Russia and the European Union "one after the other", adding that "I am not sure this could be remedied in our lifetime". He said it was important "to make clear that energy is a not a political or ideological issue, but a question of facts", adding that safe supplies to Hungary could not be guaranteed without Russian sources. "We have always managed to maintain a pragmatic relationship with Russia which enables us to frankly tell them what we think ... and we usually tell them that we condemn the war," Szijjártó said. "The war is causing a lot of damage to us, to Europe. And the sanctions are also causing a lot of difficulties and damage to us, therefore the best scenario would be ending

the war and starting negotiations, but without dialogue and open communication channels it is not possible," the foreign minister said.

On the subject of the global minimum tax, Szijjártó said it would "certainly not" increase the competitiveness of the European or the global economy. As a result of a single-bracket tax system introduced in 2010 and lowest taxes in Europe, Hungary now has a record high employment and economic growth, as well as record high volumes of exports and investments, he said. The reason why the government opposed the introduction of the global minimum tax was "to avoid returning to the pre-2010 situation", Szijjártó said. He said that the government would not have given its consent to the adoption of the minimum tax without "written guarantees" [by the European Commission] that Hungary would not be forced to raise taxes in addition to the current tax system and that the business tax could be incorporated. On another topic, Szijjártó said "after more than 40 years it is high time for Hungary to send another astronaut to space". Referring to cooperation with US company Axiom on the space project, he said eight candidates had been selected from among several hundred volunteers, out of whom four would receive full training before the actual candidate is selected right before the mission.

MINISTRY: HUNGARY-GERMANY ECONOMIC TIES ON THE UPSWING DESPITE CRISES

The confidence of German investors in the Hungarian economy is unbroken, according to the Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency (HIPA) and the German-Hungarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DUIHK), the ministry of foreign affairs and trade said on Friday. In a year-end review of Hungarian-German economic relations, the HIPA and the DUIHK concluded that bilateral economic cooperation had notable success stories "even in these times of crisis", the ministry said in a statement. Not only is the bilateral trade turnover set to see a new record this year, but German investor activity on projects managed by the HIPA was also strong as usual, the ministry said. German businesses make up the largest investor community in Hungary today, accounting for 21% of total foreign direct investment, according to 2021 central bank figures. The HIPA successfully concluded negotiations in 171 German investment projects between 2014 and the first half of 2022, bringing a total of 7.86 billion euros and 32,000 jobs to Hungary, the ministry said. It is therefore unsurprising that more than 2,700 German companies employ some 225,000 people in the country, it added. Bilateral trade turnover in the first nine months of the year increased by 12.7%, the statement

said, adding that there was a good chance for the full-year turnover to exceed 60 billion euros for the first time. Detailing this year's success stories, the ministry noted that BMW had laid the cornerstone of its 2 billion euro plant in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary. Mercedes-Benz announced the investment of 1 billion euros in its plant in Kecskemét, in central Hungary, while Audi opened its new tool plant in Győr, in the northwest. András Sávós, the president of DUIHK, said Hungary was strategically important to several German businesses as either a purchasing or sales market or a production venue. He pointed out that in recent years, the majority of German investments were upgrade and expansion projects. The ministry noted that DUIHK marks its 30th anniversary next year.

HOLLIK: 'BRUSSELS CORRUPTION SCANDAL DECADE'S BIGGEST'

The corruption scandal entangling Brussels is "the biggest such scandal" of the decade with left wing politicians "playing the main role" in it, the communications director of ruling Fidesz said on Sunday. Ever since a national conservative government came to power in Hungary in 2010, the European left has been criticising it claiming problems with the rule of law situation in the country, István Hollik told public news broadcaster Kossuth Rádió's morning programme. "Until now those have been lecturing

us who have not gotten entangled in the biggest corruption scandal of the decade,” Hollik said, adding that after those developments the Hungarian government could “accept any lecturing by the European left even less than before”. He said “there are European left wing politicians who have been bought up and those politicians do not represent the interests of European people”, adding that “they support migration and sanctions without being interested in the effects” of those on the people. Hollik said the “international network has not disappeared from European politics, it has only changed and has woven a web around EU institutions that makes it impossible for their politicians to address real problems”.

MAYOR REOPENS LANDMARK CHAIN BRIDGE TO BUSES, TAXIS, BIKES

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony reopened the capital city’s landmark Chain Bridge undergoing reconstruction to buses, taxis, motorbikes and bicycles on Friday afternoon. “Let the Chain Bridge be a bridge between the present and the future, a bridge reconnecting the city’s Pest and Buda sides and reconnecting a divided, fragmented country,” Karácsony said at the event. The mayor thanked the designers, the construction company and the Budapest Transport Centre (BKK) for their work carried out so far, as well as Budapest residents for their patience

bearing with the inconvenience caused by the renovation. He also thanked the government for its work, saying that “the government ought to share such a joint success as the renovation of the Chain Bridge”. The bridge will reopen to pedestrians once the upgrade’s last phase is completed which is expected in the late summer of 2023, Karácsony said, adding that the city will also seek the opinion of Budapest’s residents in finalising the operation of transport services on the bridge.

László Sal, the chief executive of the construction company A-Híd, said 80% of the reconstruction work has been completed which involved reinforcing 20 tonnes of metal structure, installing 900 tonnes of steel grids, polishing stone surfaces and adding new anti-corrosion coating to the chains.

Katalin Walter, BKK’s CEO, said that the bridge reopened for temporary traffic as planned 548 days after its full closure in June last year.

The 26.75 billion forint (EUR 65m) renovation of the Chain Bridge and its immediate vicinity is expected to be completed by next autumn, in time for celebrations marking the anniversary of the formation of Budapest on November 17.

OPPOSITION PARTIES DEMAND HIGHER WAGES HIKES FOR TEACHERS THAN OFFERED BY GOVT

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) and LMP parties on Saturday demanded an at least 45% immediate

increase of teachers’ wages, criticising the government’s planned increase. The interior ministry overseeing education said late on Friday that the government had earmarked 67.6 billion forints (EUR 167m) temporarily in central funding for giving teachers a 10% wage hike until Hungary receives EU funding it is entitled to. The wages of teachers is planned to be increased gradually over the next three years, the ministry said in a statement. Once Hungary receives the EU funding, those wages will be increased by 21% instead of 10% next year, by 25% in 2024 and by 29-30% in 2025, it said. In a statement, DK said that “After Interior Minister Sándor Pintér, the police general ordered to discipline rebelling schools, lectured and intimidated teachers at their recent meeting held behind closed doors, came as a next step the Orbán government’s punishment: some adjustment to the teacher’s wage allowance instead of a wage increase”. DK called the measure “humiliating”, arguing that the inflation caused by the Orbán regime “devalues teachers’ wages dramatically” which will lead to teachers’ leaving their jobs in large numbers. LMP said that the interior minister “does not take notice of the teachers’ problems and does not even understand the current situation”. The party demanded an at least 45% wage increase, insisting that a shortage of teachers due to low wages would jeopardise the future of education.

The Párbeszéd party called the increase announced “humiliating

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and deceptive”, arguing that because of inflation, wages next year “would be worth a lot less”. The party said in a statement that the government should stop “pointing a finger at the EU over unlocked funding”, noting that state secretary Bence Rétvári “had recently admitted in parliament that 85-90% of the wage increase for teachers should be covered from state coffers”.

ENERGY EMERGENCY BOARD DISCUSSES SUPPLY SITUATION, PROSPECTS

The operative board handling the energy emergency on Friday discussed the situation of Hungary’s energy supplies and related prospects and import options, the energy ministry said. The board set up by the government in the summer also

reviewed topical issues in the energy industry under the helm of Energy Minister Csaba Lantos, the ministry said in a statement. The operative board’s tasks will continue to be to work towards ensuring the protection of utility price cuts, securing energy supplies for the country and protecting Hungarian families, the ministry said.

OVER 10,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 6,029 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 4,366 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 195 people, ORFK said on Sunday.

CARCASSES OF OVER 600 PROTECTED BIRDS SEIZED FROM ROMANIAN DRIVER IN W HUNGARY

Carcasses of more than 600 pine thrushes were seized from a Romanian driver en route to Rome on motorway M7 in western Hungary, the National Tax and Customs Authority (NAV) said on Friday. An inspection of the car’s trailer revealed the frozen carcasses of the thrushes killed with a gun packed in several bags, NAV said in a statement. The driver and the passenger said they had left from Galati with the consignment and had no information either about its content or its dispatcher. The value of the birds is estimated at 15 million forints (37,000 euros). NAV has filed a report with national police, the authority said in a statement.