

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Zsolt Czeglédi

Festive Epiphany Mass at the St. Anne's Cathedral in Debrecen, eastern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Local, mayoral by-elections

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SANCTIONS 'NOT BEING USED TO PURSUE PEACE'

Sanctions are not directed towards securing peace talks, according to pundits on a Hungarian public television discussion show.

Tamás Láncki, the show's host, said the European Commission had recently published a "victory report" on sanctions against Russia, and Belgian liberal MEP Guy Verhofstadt had said that none of the nine sanctions packages were working, but had concluded nonetheless that failed sanctions could be turned to success by intensifying them, the *hirado.hu* website reported. Political scientist Zoltán Kiszelly said trade between Russia and most EU states had increased in 2022 compared with 2021, while larger Asian states were passing on cheap Russian energy to Europe.

Former green politician András Schiffer said western states were not using sanctions to force peace negotiations, and the EU was swayed by powerful companies that were asserting their own interests, with the military industrial complex "benefitting the most. *Átlátszó* journalist András Hont said the West wanted to divide the world into moral and immoral players and tried to guarantee security "without getting its hands dirty". Historian Gábor Megadja said Brussels politicians were failing to draw logical conclusions from the facts.

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SZÁZADVÉG: QUARTER OF EUROPEANS FACE HEATING DIFFICULTIES

On average every fourth household in the European Union faces difficulties with heating and unpaid utility bills, while Hungary is ranked second in the EU in the former category and third in the latter thanks to the government's scheme capping household energy prices, according to a survey published by the Századvég Foundation on Friday. Soaring energy prices resulting from the growing tension in trade between Russia and Europe have posed serious challenges in EU countries, Századvég said, citing data from its Europe-wide survey conducted from Oct. 13 to Dec. 7 as well as Eurostat figures. Countries have implemented various measures to prevent a price explosion in retail tariffs but their effectiveness varies greatly, it added. According to Századvég, Hungary's price-cap scheme, involving centrally regulated tariffs, offers the greatest protection to consumers. The company's survey dubbed Europe Project showed that 26% of Europeans, or over 100 million people, were unable to properly heat their homes. The most difficult situation was reported in Greece where 56% of respondents said they were unable to heat properly their homes, followed by Portugal and France, with 34% in both countries stating the same, Századvég said. The least affected countries were Finland with 10%, Hungary with 14% and Austria and Denmark, both 14%,

it added. Every fourth respondent in the European survey said that at least once in the past year they had been unable to pay their bills in time due to financial problems. The situation was the most serious in Greece, with 51% of the public affected, followed by Cyprus (37%), and Ireland and Bulgaria (35% in both countries), Századvég said. The lowest figures were 14% reported in Austria, 16% in the Czech Republic and 18% in Hungary, it added.

DK: EUROPEAN MINIMUM WAGE, 'FARSIGHTED ECONOMIC POLICY' NEEDED FOR HIGHER HUNGARIAN WAGES

A European minimum wage and a farsighted economic policy are needed in order to secure higher wages in Hungary, an opposition DK lawmaker said on Friday. At an online press briefing, László Kordás accused the government of wasting the past 13 years, insisting that the average wage in Hungary had failed to narrow the gap with wage levels of most European countries. The majority of indicators, he added, showed a growing gap between Hungary and the rest of Europe on this score. DK's shadow government "is the only hope" for Hungarian workers to receive decent, European-level payment for their work, he said. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán wants Hungarians to work for Balkan or Asian wages, but "our place is in the EU" and Hungarians deserve European-level wages, he added.

SOCIALISTS CALL FOR LOWER VAT IN BRACKETS AFFECTING POOR

The opposition Socialist Party has called on the government to reduce certain VAT brackets to alleviate cost pressures on poor people. A broader swathe of society face impoverishment, including graduates and Budapest residents, with single parents especially exposed to poverty, the party said in a statement on Friday, citing research by the TÁRKI institute. Two-thirds of employees did not receive a wage increase last year to offset high inflation, it added. VAT on basic foodstuffs should be reduced to zero percent, the statement said, adding that in Spain this bracket was abolished with inflation of 6.8%, while in Hungary inflation is running at over 22%, stoking a "brutal food tax" on Hungarians.

Also, tax on household energy should be set at 5%, the party said, also arguing that electricity produced at the Paks nuclear power station should be sold at cost, while the government should withdraw higher network usage fees.

OVER 15,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 5,264 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 10,188 came to the country via Romania, according to the

national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 586 people. Altogether 142 refugees, 59 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said on Friday.

HUNGARY JOBLESS RATE 3.8% IN NOV

Hungary's jobless rate in November was 3.8%, as against 3.6% the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Taking the 3-month rolling average, the number of jobless aged 15-74 grew by 7,000 to 184,000, while the unemployment rate went up by 0.1 percentage point to 3.8% in September-November last year compared with a year earlier. The average number of employed aged 15-74 was 4.706 million, 29,000 more than the previous year. In the September-November period, the number of employed rose by an annual 26,000 to 4.713 million. The number of employees in the primary labour market grew by 26,000 and the number of workers abroad went up by 16,000, though there was a drop of 16,000 in the public sector.

RETAIL SALES UP 0.6% IN NOV

Hungarian retail sales in November grew by an annual 0.6%, the Central

Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Calendar-year data showed the same rate of growth. Food sales dropped by 6.7%, while non-food sales were 2.3% lower. Meanwhile, motor fuel sales rose by 27.7%. Headline growth was unchanged from the previous month. In absolute terms, retail sales came to 1,541 billion forints (EUR 3.9bn). Food sales accounted for 45% of the total, non-food sales for 38% and sales at petrol stations for 17%. A detailed breakdown of the data shows adjusted sales fell at nearly all types of retail businesses, with second-hand shops, clothing and footwear shops, computer shops and petrol stations among the exceptions. For the period January-November, retail sales rose by an unadjusted and adjusted 6.4% year-on-year. Adjusted food sales slipped 0.8%, non-food sales rose by 6.6% and motor fuel sales climbed 26.2%.

DUNA HOUSE FRANCHISE COMMISSIONS REVENUE FALLS 26% IN Q4

Commissions revenue of listed real estate broker Duna House's franchise network fell by an annual 26% to 2.8 billion forints (EUR 7.06m) in the fourth quarter, the company said in a preliminary report. Commissions

volume in Hungary dropped 30% to 1.8 billion forints as interest rates climbed and purchasing power fell, Duna House said. In Poland, commissions volume declined by 24% to 700 million forints. Commissions revenue of Duna House's recently acquired Realizza brand in Italy reached 100 million forints. Commissions revenue of Duna House's own offices slipped 24% to 400 million forints. Brokered loan volume of the group jumped 51% to 192 billion forints, boosted by the Italian acquisition. Brokered loan volume reached 141 billion forints in Italy, 33 billion forints in Poland and 18 billion forints in Hungary.

BELGIAN TERRORIST SUSPECT ARRESTED IN BUDAPEST

Acting on an international warrant issued by the Belgian authorities, a 29-year-old woman wanted on suspicion of terrorism has been arrested at the Népliget bus station, the Budapest Police Headquarters (BRFK) said on its website on Friday. The suspect was taken into custody on Wednesday evening and taken to court for an extradition hearing on Friday, the website said.