

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán meets with former soccer manager and coach Fabio Capello in his office

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the war in Ukraine

## TOP STORY

# DEAL SIGNED TO PURCHASE VODAFONE HUNGARY

Hungarian state investment company Corvinus has inked a deal to purchase a 49% stake in Vodafone Europe's Hungarian unit, while 4iG unit Antenna Hungária is acquiring a 51% stake in the telecom company, the economy development minister said.

The 660 billion forint (EUR 1.6bn) acquisition is Hungary's biggest since 1990, Márton Nagy said in a statement. Due diligence on Vodafone Hungary has been completed and the financial report is expected to be concluded on Jan. 31, the statement added. "In an economic situation burdened by the war and sanctions, we must not give up on our endeavour to further strengthen Hungary's competitiveness and independence," Nagy said. "It is a primary objective of the government to establish national ownership in sectors of national strategic importance such as insurance and telecommunications, in addition to the banking, energy and media sectors. Vodafone Hungary's purchase serves this goal and will further strengthen our country's sovereignty." As a result of the acquisition, a fully Hungarian-owned "national champion" will be created in the domestic telecoms sector, helping to improve Hungary's competitiveness by meeting 21st century digital standards and providing high quality services to individuals and corporate clients, the statement said. Vodafone Hungary serves 3.8 million customers.

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**SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO SHIP 10,000 TONNES OF GRAIN FROM UKRAINE TO AFRICA**

Hungary will finance the shipping of 10,000 tonnes of grain worth 3.5 million US dollars from Ukraine to Africa as part of its efforts to resolve the global food crisis, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after meeting his Congolese counterpart in Budapest on Monday. Though Hungary and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are geographically far apart, they are both affected by global security threats, Szijjártó told a press conference he held jointly with Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen'Apala, according to a foreign ministry statement. Szijjártó cited the example of the negative effects of the Ukraine war, such as the food crisis which affects Africa the most. Both countries have an interest in peace being achieved as soon as possible, Szijjártó said, urging dialogue, a ceasefire and peace talks.

Concerning bilateral economic ties, Szijjártó highlighted the electric vehicle industry and battery production as a key link between Hungary and the DR Congo. Hungary has the world's third largest EV battery production capacity and will soon be ranked first thanks to the investment projects under way, the minister said. Szijjártó noted that one of the most important raw materials used in EV battery production was cobalt, with more than 70% of the cobalt used

by the sector coming from the DR Congo. The future success of the global EV industry depends greatly on the unimpeded extraction and supply of cobalt, Szijjártó said. Several Hungarian companies will get to contribute to this, the minister said, noting that a 600 million dollar infrastructure development programme aimed at linking the DR Congo with Zambia and Tanzanian ports will be headed by Hungarian construction industry companies. The project will shorten the time it takes for the DR Congo's raw materials to reach sea ports from over a month to around ten days, Szijjártó said. The project's preparatory phase is under way and the Hungarian companies involved have signed the concession contract, he said.

On another subject, Szijjártó said the DR Congo was the fifth largest recipient of aid from the Hungarian government's Hungary Helps humanitarian programme. Hungary will offer scholarships to ten Congolese university students each year starting in 2023, he said. Meanwhile, Szijjártó welcomed that under a collocation agreement, Hungary will open a diplomatic mission on the premises of the Serbian embassy in Kinshasa later this year. Szijjártó also said that Lutundula was the first Congolese foreign minister to pay an official visit to Hungary, adding that this highlighted the importance of the two countries marking the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties this year.

**RULING PARTIES COULD END UP WITH 16 MEPS**

Fresh polling data shows that Hungary's ruling parties, with support of 56% of the electorate, could end up with 16 out of Hungary's 21 European parliamentary mandates. The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK), with support of 14%, would receive 3 EP mandates, while Momentum and the radical Mi Hazánk parties (both with 6%) would each secure a single mandate, according to a survey the Nézőpont Institute released on Monday. Each of the other parties on their own (combined support of 18%) would fail to clear the 5% parliamentary threshold, the survey found.

"If DK and Momentum managed to entice voters from those parties, it would obviously impact the number of their mandates," Nézőpont said, adding that in 2019 both parties took away votes from the green LMP party. In the phone poll of 1,000 people conducted from Jan. 2 to 4, more than 50% of respondents declared an intention to participate in the vote.

The governing Fidesz and Christian Democratic parties maintained a stable lead with 48% support, while DK had the support of 7%. Mi Hazánk had the backing of 5%, while Momentum was on 3% and the Socialist Party and LMP each had 1%. Párbeszéd, formerly led by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony, registered zero support, Nézőpont said.



The pollster said that a strong sign of the opposition side's woes was that the satirical Two-Tailed Dog party, which has called for the entire opposition to be replaced, had the support of 4%.

### **ORBÁN WELCOMES FORMER CZECH PM BABIŠ'S ACQUITTAL IN EU FUNDS FRAUD CASE**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has welcomed that former Czech premier Andrej Babiš has been acquitted of charges of fraud involving European Union funds. Babiš had been accused of unlawfully securing 50 million Czech koruna (EUR 2.1m) in EU funds through one of his companies for the construction of a leisure centre more than ten years ago. "Glad to see that facts still matter!" Orbán said on Twitter in reaction to Monday's verdict by the Prague Municipal Court. "My best wishes to @AndrejBabis. Keep on fighting!" Orbán said. Babiš is a candidate in the Czech presidential election whose first round is to be held on Jan. 13-14.

### **MINISTRY: ERASMUS+ PROGRAMMES TO CONTINUE UNDISTURBED THIS YEAR**

The European Union's Erasmus+ programmes can continue undisturbed in Hungary this year, the ministry of culture and innovation said on Monday. A European Commission decision made in December

concerning public interest asset management foundations carrying out public duties does not affect exchange programmes, the ministry said in a statement. The government will continue coordinating until the March deadline in order to ensure continued undisturbed access to resources affecting higher education, it added. Ongoing exchange programmes and those to be announced this year for higher education students and teachers are not affected by the EC decision, the ministry said. "Hungary has fulfilled all its commitments and therefore refuses to accept the European Commission's discriminative decision to exclude public interest asset management foundations carrying out public duties and the universities they manage from direct EU tenders," the statement said. "This will be clarified, similarly to the issue of other EU resources, by March 16, 2023," the ministry added. The statement was issued after a press report suggesting that universities run by public interest asset management foundations will not receive fresh funding as part of the EU's Erasmus programme -- under which students from Hungary can study abroad.

### **NAVRACSICS: CULTURE CAPITAL OF EUROPE TITLE 'UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY'**

The European Capital of Culture title presents "a unique opportunity" for Veszprém and the surrounding region, Tibor Navracsics, the regional

development minister, said on Monday, unveiling the programme ahead of the official opening on Jan. 21. Veszprém and the Bakony-Balaton region will now have the chance to boost their profile as popular tourist destinations, given the beauty of the landscape, the sophistication of locals, and the quality of programmes on offer, the minister told a press conference in Budapest. A spectacular celebration will kick off the cultural capital season in Veszprém on Jan. 21, with 50 free events at 13 locations put on throughout the city over the weekend, he noted. The European Capital of Culture initiative began almost 40 years ago as a way to highlight intersections of European cultural heritage and the cultural community, Navracsics said, adding that the idea was to show that there was more that united the nations of Europe than separated them.

### **LMP: GOVT SHOULD RAISE TEACHERS' WAGES INSTEAD OF STATE'S VODAFONE STAKE PURCHASE**

The opposition LMP party has criticised the state's purchase of a 49% stake in Vodafone Europe's Hungarian unit, saying the government should instead be spending taxpayers' money on increasing the wages of teachers. Antal Csárdi, the party's deputy group leader, told a press conference that giving teachers a 25% wage increase would cost 170 billion forints, around half the amount of the state's 49%

stake in Vodafone. Csárdi also raised the possibility that 4iG may eventually take over the state's stake at a discount, adding that it was doubtful that the state would secure a return on its investment.

### **OPPOSITION: NO POLITICIAN SHOULD BE BOARD MEMBER OF UNIVERSITY FOUNDATIONS**

The Democratic Coalition (DK), Jobbik, Momentum and LMP opposition parties have issued a statement objecting to the government policy of allowing politicians to sit on the boards of trustees of universities run by foundations. The statement was made after a press report suggesting that universities run by foundations will not receive fresh funding as part of the EU's Erasmus programme -- under which students from Hungary can study abroad -- and Horizon Europe research and innovation schemes.

DK is introducing a bill to prohibit state leaders and incumbent lawmakers from sitting on boards of trustees of universities managed by foundations, the party's deputy group leader, Gergely Arató, told an online press briefing on Monday. He added that the European Commission had already declared as "unacceptable" the government putting public universities "in the hands of trustees led by politicians".

Jobbik deputy group leader Koloman Brenner said students and

lecturers should not be punished for the government's policy of putting certain universities into the hands of foundations. He called on the government to start negotiations with foundation-run institutions -- especially the large scientific universities -- on returning them to the state as a matter of urgency.

Momentum MEP Katalin Cseh said in a statement that her party had turned to the Commission asking it not to exclude Hungarian students from the Erasmus programme owing to "the corruption of [PM Viktor] Orbán and his people". LMP said in a statement that the ruling Fidesz party had not consulted anyone before changing the Hungarian university system. Reforming Hungary's higher education sector, it added, was "a national matter", and the country's future prosperity was at stake. LMP wants strict rules on conflict of interest to be established, it said.

The Socialist Party said in a statement that it had been predictable that the foundational model for universities would "cause serious disadvantages" for the higher education sector, institutions and students. The party said tens of thousands of Hungarian students would be deprived of the opportunity to establish international relationships and acquire new knowledge, which they said would lead to Hungary falling further behind. The party said it will write a letter to János Csák, the minister responsible for higher education, asking him to initiate talks with the EC

to prevent Hungary from missing out on the opportunities and funds offered by the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe schemes.

### **CLOSE TO 19,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY**

Fully 5,999 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 12,827 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 280 people. Altogether 63 refugees, 36 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said on Monday.

### **INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT GROWTH SLOWS TO CRAWL IN NOV**

The growth rate of Hungarian industrial output in November slowed to an annual 0.5% from 5.9% in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Monday. Adjusted for the number of working days, output grew by 0.8%. Growth in car manufacturing was up "significantly", KSH said. Computer, electronics and optical equipment, as well as food, drinks and tobacco saw a drop in output. In the Jan-Nov period, output grew by an annual 6%, while month on month it fell by 0.7%, based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data.

## **HUNGARIAN COMPANY DEVELOPS AIR CLEANSING DEVICE AIMED AT PREVENTING SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS**

A Hungarian firm has unveiled a device which it says can prevent the spread of the coronavirus in the air through disinfection and humidifying. The compact device developed by CYX Kft with EU support between September 2021 and December 2022 filters out and destroys viruses and other pathogens such as bacteria, fungi spores before they can be spread between people. Scaling up for mass production of the device, which can also reduce PM2.5 small airborne dust particles, is under way and it is expected to enter the market in the second quarter of 2023, the company said on Monday. The European Union has provided 697 million forints (EUR 1.7m) of support as part of the Economic Development and Innovation Operational Program for the 995 million forint project.

## **UNIVERSITY OF SOPRON FOUNDING MEMBER OF NATURE POSITIVE UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCE**

The University of Sopron is the only Hungarian founding member in the Nature Positive Universities Alliance (NPUA) which has been set up under an initiative by the United Nations Environment Programme and the University of Oxford, the University of Sopron said on Monday. The organisation set up by 117 universities aims to enable the higher education sector to effectively help restore natural resources and biodiversity, the statement said. More than 400 universities have joined the network so far, it added. The fact that the University of Sopron was among the founding members of NPUA is also a recognition of the institution's efforts for sustainability, the statement said. These include a comprehensive development of the Botanic Gardens which also functions as a campus, the university's advance towards carbon-neutral operation and a forest planting

scheme it manages. In addition to its membership in NPUA, the University of Sopron is also a founding member of the Hungarian Universities Sustainability Platform established last autumn, it added.

## **CARDINAL ERDŐ: POPE BENEDICT SOUGHT UNITY OF CHRISTIANS, DIALOGUE**

Pope Benedict XVI was dedicated to seeking the unity of Christians and a dialogue with all people with good intentions, and he respectfully listened to others' opinions, Cardinal Péter Erdő, the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, said in Saint Stephen's Basilica in Budapest on Monday. At the same time, Pope Benedict was faithful to Christ's teachings, Erdő told a holy mass held by members of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference honouring the Pope Emeritus who died on December 31. Erdő also said that Pope Benedict's life's work had been an exposition of Christ's truth, but not in the form of abstract speculation but with words of love.