

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán meets Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić in Budapest

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

UPCOMING EVENTS

Finance ministry releases prelim budget report for 2022

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

HUNGARY, SERBIA 'DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY WAR'

Hungary and Serbia are directly and severely affected by the war in Ukraine and illegal migration, and they both have an interest in the armed conflict ending as soon as possible, Hungary's foreign minister said after meeting his Serbian counterpart.

Few other countries in Europe are affected by the two simultaneous security challenges to such an extent, the ministry said, citing Péter Szijjártó, who addressed a joint press conference with Ivica Dačić. "The prolongation of the war and its possible escalation pose severe risks for both countries," he said. "We understand that it does not appear such a severe issue from hundreds or thousands of kilometres away, but those that cause an extension or escalation of the war act against our national interests," Szijjártó added. He said both countries profited greatly from bilateral cooperation, as demonstrated by the record-high 75% increase in Hungary-Serbia trade last year. "The pledge to Hungary's energy security" currently lies with Serbia, he said, with the TurkStream the only east-west gas pipeline on the continent which operates at 100% capacity, he said. Last year, 4.8 billion cubic metres of natural gas came to Hungary from Serbia and some 438 million cubic metres flowed in the other direction, he added. Dačić also held talks with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY INTERESTED IN PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO SERBIA-KOSOVO TURMOIL

Hungary has an interest in a peaceful solution and compromise through dialogue regarding the turmoil between Serbia and Kosovo, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in response to a question at a press conference held on Tuesday. Accepting Kosovo into various European organisations prematurely would destabilise the path towards achieving a compromise, so the government will vote against Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe if a vote is held on it, he told the joint press conference held with his Serbian counterpart, Ivica Dačić, after their talks in Budapest.

Concerning bilateral energy ties, Szijjártó said Hungary was ready to carry out new infrastructure developments towards enhancing the security of Serbia's crude oil supplies. The sides will double the capacity of electricity links between the two countries within five years, he added.

MINISTER HAILS RECORD-LOW JOBSEEKER COUNT

Despite the war and the crisis caused by sanctions, the number of jobholders has remained above 4.7 million for six months, while the number of jobseekers sank to a record low in 2022, the minister for economic development said on Tuesday.

Márton Nagy hailed as a "historic success" that the average number of the registered unemployed was only 238,168 last year, as against 582,664 in 2010. In December 2022, the number of registered jobseekers was 230,345, the second lowest figure since post-communist transformation after last June's figure, he added. Nagy said the government would continue making every effort to protect jobs, but the solution would be to end the war in Ukraine and lift the sanctions burdening businesses.

GOVT EXTENDS SME ENERGY SUBSIDIES THROUGH Q1

The government has extended a subsidy programme for SMEs challenged by higher energy prices through the first quarter of 2023, the minister for economic development said. Under the scheme, the government is compensating SMEs in energy-intensive manufacturing sectors as well as in the commercial accommodations business for up to half of the increase in their energy bills. Márton Nagy noted that the government decided earlier to broaden eligibility for the scheme by lowering the threshold for energy costs-to-revenue from 3% to 2%. An energy efficiency investment programme is coupled with scheme. The allocation for both is 100 billion forints (EUR 252.4m) in 2022 and 120 billion forints in 2023. Over 36,000 SMEs are eligible for the programmes.

HUNGARY SENDS NEW POLICE UNIT TO NORTH MACEDONIA

Mass illegal migration poses a major public safety risk in Europe, a state secretary of the interior ministry told the new police unit leaving to serve in North Macedonia on Tuesday. Bence Rétvári thanked the members of the 80th Hungarian police contingent for helping to intercept the migrants seeking to make their way to western Europe via the Western Balkan route. The Hungarian police officers will not be interacting with people who want to come to Europe legally, "but with people who take even their first step towards Europe illegally", Rétvári said. Hungary has been helping to patrol the North Macedonian border for seven years now and Hungarian officers have also carried out border protection tasks in Slovenia and Serbia, he added. Hungary, Serbia and Austria are working closely together on combatting illegal migration, Rétvári said.

Hungary last year sent a total of 350 police officers to serve on border protection missions abroad, and between 300 and 400 in the preceding years, the state secretary said. The Hungarian authorities last year thwarted some 270,000 illegal entry attempts on the southern border, which amounts to an average of 750 entry attempts a day, he said. The solution to illegal migration would be to intercept migrants as far south

as possible, for instance, on the Greek-Turkish border, Rétvári said. "Then the whole of Europe would be a safer continent," he said. "Unfortunately the leaders of the European Union have not come to such a decision." If the EU's external borders are not protected it will lead to a return of the bloc's internal borders, he said, noting that the EU's economic advantage came from free movement across its internal borders. Rétvári regretted that the EU had covered less than 2% of the 1.5 billion euros Hungary has spent on protecting its borders. The state secretary also pointed out that illegal migrants were becoming increasingly aggressive, noting they had attacked police or border installations on 485 instances in 2022.

LMP: HUNGARY AS A BATTERY MANUFACTURING POWERHOUSE WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES

The opposition LMP party has accused the government of turning Hungary into a battery-manufacturing powerhouse at the expense of the country's environment and natural resources. The water and natural resources of the eastern city of Debrecen must not be allowed to be compromised for the sake of Chinese investors, László Lóránt Keresztes, chairman of parliament's sustainable development committee, told an online press briefing on Tuesday.

The green party MP noted that battery plants guzzle up water and energy, and require big infrastructure developments funded by the taxpayer. Quoting László Palkovics, the former technology minister, he said the planned Debrecen plant was "anything but environmentally friendly".

Meanwhile, the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) said the people of Debrecen "want no part of the Chinese battery plant". Speaking about a recent disaster management forum in connection with the CATL plant being built in the city, Zoltán Varga, DK's local MP, told a press conference that Debrecen residents did not want a plant in the city that would be a danger to their environment, their health and the future of their children and grandchildren. Varga insisted that it had become clear at Monday's forum that by supporting the investment, ruling Fidesz's "local troops betrayed and failed Debrecen".

OVER 13,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 5,886 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 7,282 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 241 people. Altogether 45 refugees, 16 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train, ORFK said on Tuesday.

HUNGARIAN 'ATHLETES OF THE YEAR' ELECTED

World record holding swimmer Kristóf Milák and sprint hurdler Luca Kozák have been elected Hungary's Athletes of the Year by the country's sports journalists. The coach of the year title went to Marco Rossi of the national soccer team. The men's national soccer team won the category of team competitions in traditional team sports and the women's national sabre fencing team won the category of team competitions in individual sports. Parakayaker Péter Pál Kiss and para swimmer Bianka Papp won in the disabled sports categories. The prizes were awarded at a gala at the State Opera House in Budapest late on Monday.

UNRULY PASSENGER FORCES RYANAIR BUCHAREST FLIGHT TO MAKE UNSCHEDULED LANDING IN BUDAPEST

A Ryanair flight from London was forced to make an unscheduled stop at Budapest's Liszt Ferenc International Airport on Tuesday because of an unruly passenger, the airport's operator said. Police arrived at the scene and handled the situation after the plane which was headed to Bucharest landed, Budapest Airport told MTI.