

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán meets with Organisation of Turkic States (OTS) Secretary General Kubanychbek Omuraliev in Budapest

MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Ecumenical prayer week gets under way**

**Local, mayoral by-elections**

**Events related to the war in Ukraine**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: WE HAVE ENTERED THE AGE OF DANGERS

It is possible that 2022 will be remembered as the year Hungary entered “the age of dangers”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview to public radio on Friday, adding that the country had responded proactively.

After the pandemic came the war in Ukraine, followed by an energy crisis, the prime minister said. EU sanctions, he added, caused significant inflation, “and migration pressure is growing once more at our borders”. But Hungary has responded to all these dangers proactively, Orbán said. “We didn’t freeze up; we didn’t want to evade, but we’ve built up defensive positions,” he said. Meanwhile, the prime minister called for the abolition of “failed EU sanctions”.

Orbán noted that the cost of energy imports skyrocketed to 17 billion euros from 7 billion, and the government established a fund for protecting caps on household energy bills up to the threshold of average consumption. The government did not pass higher energy prices to households, but rather Hungarian families receive an energy subsidy averaging 181,000 forints each month, he noted. Had the advice of liberal economists and the Hungarian left wing been taken, a minimum of 1 million families would have gone bankrupt, the prime minister insisted.

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## **ORBÁN: GOVT TO HANDLE NEW THREATS IN PROACTIVE SPIRIT**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public radio on Friday that the government would handle any new threats that arise this year in an unchanged proactive spirit. Regarding sanctions, Orbán said that “someone in Brussels” should finally admit to having “messed up”. Without sanctions, energy prices would drop instantly and inflation would be halved, he said, adding that there was no sign of this happening. Only Germany or France could sway the EU on this matter, he said. To pay for energy subsidies, companies that make excessive profits out of high inflation and higher energy prices must make a commensurate contribution, he said, adding that the companies had been made to understand that this was a temporary measure. “In Hungary, they understand this,” Orbán said, adding that western European governments did not enjoy the same position of strength to enact such a measure. European citizens are the victims of the failed sanctions policy and the war in Ukraine, he said, adding that Europe was the biggest loser of the conflict economically speaking. Commenting on the EU decision to withdraw Hungary’s Erasmus funding in 2024, Orbán said the government would not allow students “to be the victims of any decision in Brussels”, and the Hungarian budget would make up the difference in any lost Erasmus

funds. “Those with children say: ‘What kind of people are these?’ Hungary and Brussels may very well have a dispute, but what kind of person takes revenge on another person’s child?” He added that there were people in Brussels prepared to settle a political dispute by taking revenge on Hungarian young people. The prime minister said EU objections to the Hungarian education system were “nonsense”, and politicians, he added, often sat on the board of trustees of universities in western Europe, too. “They want a change of government,” Orbán said. “Brussels has a vision of the future that is at odds with what Hungarians think. They [people in Brussels] think Europe must change, should be more diverse and migrants should be accepted,” he said, adding that so far the EU had not succeeded in forcing the Hungarian government to follow suit. “We have our own ideas about the future and how to raise children,” Orbán said, adding that the EU believed that civil and social movements should play a big role in bringing up children. “We think that this is our job, the job of parents.”

“They want to take as many as powers as possible to Brussels” in an effort to “build a large European empire with provinces rather than member states”, Orbán said. “Since the Hungarian government consistently promotes its philosophy and Hungary’s interests,” they want the government replaced, he said. “Voters decided otherwise,” he added. “Irrespective of the outcome of the election, Brussels is working to force us to do as they

think appropriate,” Orbán said, adding that “all conflicts should be assessed in that context”.

## **ORBÁN: HUNGARY’S FINANCIAL RESERVES AT ‘RECORD HIGH’**

Hungary’s financial reserves have “never been as high as the government has amassed over the past three months”, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview to public radio on Friday. He said the reserves were at a “record high”, and “not only is it impossible to corner Hungary, but we will manage without them [the EU]”. “Of course, with them it would be simpler and we could progress faster, but they are misguided in Brussels if they think the sun will not rise without them.” “They are facing that fact now,” he added. On another subject, Orbán said the primary political task was to build an economic system in which “everybody can find employment”. “So far we have managed: one million more people have jobs now than in 2010,” he said. Despite being “a year of dangers”, 2022 saw the highest ever employment figures, he said. Those figures “will even get higher in 2023”, he said, adding that job protection was one of the highest priorities for the coming year. The prime minister said the real value of wages would grow in the 2022-2023 period. He called for “ambitious goals” for 2023, while he said the crisis should be managed while maintaining the country’s “great national objectives”. The government will further develop rather than whittle

down family assistance as well as job protection mechanisms, he said. Orbán also mentioned as important priorities reducing inflation “to a single digit” by the end of the year and maintaining economic growth.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ MEETS TURKISH EDUCATION MINISTER**

After meeting Turkey’s education minister, Mahmut Özer, on Friday, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said the government’s goal was to make Hungarian higher education competitive internationally, so it must be made attractive to foreign students. At a joint press conference, Szijjártó said the government had been working on making its higher education system competitive since 2010, and Hungary is now the 12th most popular foreign destination for Turkish students, with more than 1,000 attending courses here this year. Also, 16 Hungarian universities have Turkish partners with a constant exchange of lecturers and students. Two universities run a Turkology department, while Hungarian studies are available at Ankara University, he noted. Cooperation will be broadened to encompass secondary education as well, with an improvement in the quality of vocational training on the cards, he said. The sides signed a higher education cooperation agreement for the period 2023-2025. The government is increasing the number of scholarship places available to Turkish students from

150 to 200 each year, and medical and nuclear training is also included in the agreement. Szijjártó called Hungary-Turkey ties “strategic”, and, referring to the war in Ukraine, said relations were all the more important in current times of uncertainty. Turkey, he added, was the only country to have taken “promising steps towards peace” by shepherding the deal to resume grain deliveries to Ukraine, and he said Hungary requested that Turkey carry on pursuing its mediation efforts with the aim of ending the war as soon as possible. Responding to a question about the withdrawal of Hungary’s Erasmus funding in 2024, the minister said “new symptoms of Hungarianophobia are starting to appear” in the European Commission. He dismissed the decision to suspend funds for Hungarian universities run by foundation as “outrageous and without grounds whatsoever”. Szijjártó said people with government positions and responsibilities sat on the boards of western European universities, yet in Hungary’s case this was seen as a problem, and he said this amounted to “double standards”. Further, Hungary, when drawing up its conflict-of-interest guidelines, had adhered to EC rules in their entirety, he added. Meanwhile, on the subject of the planned big increase in transit fees for oil shipments in Croatia, the minister said Hungarian oil and gas company MOL had concluded a temporary three-month agreement regarding the matter, and hopefully fair long-term agreement would be reached

in the meantime. The government is prepared to turn to the European authorities if attempts in this direction do not succeed, he added.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ CONDEMNS HANGING OF ERDOGAN PUPPET IN STOCKHOLM**

Foreign Minister Peter Szijjártó harshly condemned on Friday the hanging of a puppet depicting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by its feet by Kurdish protesters in Stockholm the previous day, the ministry said. At a press conference with Turkish Education Minister Mahmut Özer, Szijjártó said the actions had been “shameful and distasteful”, prompting the most resolute objection. Making jokes about hanging anyone is shocking in and of itself and the action was seriously disrespectful of not only the president but all the people of Turkey, he said. “I think it is a fair expectation that such actions should not be allowed in the European Union which prides itself on its moral standards,” he said. Hungary expects the local authorities to find the perpetrators, he said, adding that “we are certainly expressing solidarity and sympathy with the people of Turkey and President Erdoğan”.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: EUROPE-C ASIA COOPERATION VALUABLE AMID WAR SITUATION**

Cooperation between Europe and Central Asia is all the more valuable

amid the current situation connected with the war in Ukraine, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said after meeting the new head of the Organisation of Turkic States on Friday. Hungary's participation in the work of the organisation helps it to sustain its economic growth, the minister said at a joint press conference held with the organisation's secretary general, Kubanychbek Omuraliev. East-West cooperation has faced serious difficulties owing to the war in Ukraine, and in some areas it has seized up altogether, Szijjártó said. Hungary, given its geographical location, is affected more than others, taking into consideration that its economy has traditionally benefited highly from Europe-Asia cooperation. Hungary, he added, did not want a new Cold War or a new Iron Curtain, or a fissure between East and West. The minister said new transport routes and partnerships may arise from connections between Europe and Central Asia which sustain elements of the existing economic model and East-West cooperation. Hungary has benefited as an observer in the Organisation of Turkic States, he said, noting that Hungary has joined the organisation's connectivity platform for expanding transport links throughout Eurasia, which can bypass routes that are now blocked owing to the war in Ukraine. East-West trade, meanwhile, can benefit from reduced red tape, infrastructure developments, and digital technologies promoted by the organisation, he said. The minister also

noted that the organisation's Drought Prevention Institute will be set up in Budapest, tapping the knowledge and technology of world-class Hungarian engineering in the area of water management. Hungary is also joining the organisation's investment fund, Szijjártó said, adding that "in today's challenging international environment, investments are vitally important for sustaining economic growth." The minister noted that each year 650 students from countries belonging to the Organisation of Turkic States attend Hungarian higher education institutions with scholarships, and many of them also study here at their own expense. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán received Omuraliev later in the day, and was quoted by his press chief as saying that "at times of danger, it is especially important to have as many allies and partners in the world as possible." Referring to Hungary's Eastern Opening strategy at the talks, Orbán said "we want to make everyone interested in making Hungary a successful and safe country". Omuraliev is on a working visit in Hungary, as part of a tour of Turkic countries to have talks on the future and activities of his organisation.

### **LMP CALLS ON GOVT TO WITHDRAW DECREE SANCTIONING TEACHERS**

The opposition LMP party said a government decree penalising teachers who have mounted protests was both legally and

morally unfounded, and it demanded its withdrawal. Teachers can be penalised for their current actions at any time until the end of the school year under the decree, the party's deputy group leader Antal Csárdi told a press briefing on Friday, adding that the decree was contrary to the rule of law and a departure from the labour code. He said this deprivation of rights was more serious than the restriction of the right to strike, adding that the aim of the decree was to intimidate teachers who spoke out against poor teaching conditions and their hardships making a living. Noting headline inflation of 24.5% in December and a 14% rise in the minimum wage, he said that by comparison a salary increase of just 10% was awarded to teachers. The PSZ teacher union has claimed the government "has backed down" in connection with civil disobedience by teachers from Szentgotthárd.

Most of the teaching staff, 29 teachers, "with their united stand proved that sacking an entire teaching staff when there is a big shortage of teachers does not work," PSZ said in a statement on Friday, adding that it will join a strike announced by the PDSZ teacher union. PSZ said it had promised to carry on protesting until the demands of teachers and the trade union are met, adding that they called on all education staff to participate in a one-week work stoppage starting on Jan. 23. The statement added: "What 2022 failed to solve, 2023 will!"

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## **SURVEY: BUDAPEST RESIDENTS 'WANT PEACE AND REJECT SANCTIONS' - THINK-TANK**

Fully 85% of Budapest residents want peace to be forged between Russia and Ukraine, while 63% see sanctions on Russia as excessive or sufficient already, the Századvég Foundation said on Friday, revealing its latest survey.

Fully 78% expressed opposition to the European Union and its member states buying weapons for Ukraine, and 76% objected to the EU training Ukrainian soldiers. The think-tank said Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, had "created the impression" that the views of Budapest residents were at odds with the pro-peace government in respect of the war. During an official visit to Kyiv, Karácsony said: "The Hungarian people are not synonymous with the Hungarian government" and "the majority of the people of Budapest understand exactly what is happening in Ukraine," the think-tank added.

Such comments prompted Századvég to conduct a survey of Budapest adults on issues related to the war in Ukraine in December, its statement said.

Accordingly, there is a dim view of top politicians who back the continuation of the war, it said. Meanwhile, 82% of respondents in the capital had a negative view of Russian President Vladimir Putin, while 57% saw US President Joe

Biden in a bad light. Fully 52% had an unfavourable view of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Some 65% of Budapest residents said they were against Hungarian taxpayers' money being used to finance Ukraine and 66% said that Brussels was acting in a unfair manner holding back some of the EU funds allocated for Hungary and Poland, Századvég said. It added that some 56% of Budapest residents expressed agreement with the way that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had handled the situation developed as a result of the Russian-Ukraine crisis.

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## **GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY'S GAS SUPPLY SECURE**

Gas is flowing into Hungary, and even if this were not the case there is a sufficient amount of gas stored to see the country through the winter and beyond, a government official told public broadcaster M1 on Friday. Tamás Menczer, the foreign ministry state secretary for external relations, said the rate at which Hungarian gas stores were filled relative to consumption was around double the European average. Still, Hungarian energy security and gas supply depends on the fulfilment of the long-term agreement with Russia and the smooth operation of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, which last year alone pumped 4.8 billion cubic meters into the country, almost half of the 10 billion cubic meters of Hungary's annual consumption, he added. At the same time, the government is always looking for

ways to diversify gas procurement, he said. Whereas in 2010, Hungary had pipeline connectors with only two neighbouring countries, now there are six, the state secretary added. Menczer mentioned the possibility of increasing LNG capacities in Croatia, production at the Neptun Deep gas field in Romania, and Azeri gas deliveries to Hungary, adding that time and serious infrastructure developments were needed for these developments to be realised, "so Russian gas cannot be replaced for now". He said that nuclear energy was far more predictable, cheaper and more environmentally friendly than Russian gas, and Hungary objected to any EU sanctions that could hold back the project to expand the Paks nuclear power plant.

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## **POLICEMAN STABBED TO DEATH IN BUDAPEST**

A police officer on duty was stabbed to death and two others were injured in Budapest's 11th district late on Thursday, the police said on its website. The officers were in a unit alerted to a block of flats by residents after a violent neighbour had attempted to break into a home. The intruder assaulted the police officers and fled onto the street, where he was shot in the leg and captured. The three injured officers were rushed to hospital but one of them could not be saved, the website said. Later on Friday, the central prosecutor of investigations said the stabbing had not been an act of terrorism. Pál Furcht said an

investigation into homicide and homicide attempt was under way. He added that the perpetrator was in custody and was being questioned.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán expressed his condolences with the family of the deceased officer. Speaking on public Kossuth Radio, Orbán said such occurrences were rare, and law enforcement were doing a good job.

Police spokesperson Kristóf Gál said proceedings have been initiated to declare the deceased officer as one who died a hero's death in the line of duty. He also expressed his fellow staff members' sympathy with the officer's family.

Parties of the opposition voiced their regret to family members of the victim and wished a speedy recovery to the two injured policemen. Klára Dobrev, shadow prime minister of the Democratic Coalition, called the incident a "terrible tragedy". She said the death of a young officer that had made an oath to "protect our safety and public order even at the cost of his life" was an "inconceivable loss". Előd Novák, head of the radical Mi Hazánk party, proposed that the officer should be promoted posthumously, and proposed a reward to the other policemen that had captured the perpetrator. He said he would propose that parliament broaden police officers' rights to use their weapons when on duty, as well as to equip them with protective gear.

Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, contacted Budapest

police chief Tamás Terdik to obtain information on the "shocking murder of police" and offered the city's help to the victim's family.

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### **NÉZŐPONT: MAJORITY OF HUNGARIANS CONSIDER EU LEADERS CORRUPT - SURVEY**

Fully 54% of respondents in a recent Nézőpont survey considered the leaders of the European Union corrupt, while 28% held the opposite view. Fully 70% of supporters of the ruling parties had a negative opinion of the EU's leadership in view of the recent corruption scandal, while only 14% did not regard it as corrupt on balance, Nézőpont said on Friday. On the other hand, 52% of opposition respondents said they did not believe that European leaders could be corrupt, while 31% of respondents in that group thought "charges of corruption were justified". Nézőpont's phone survey of 1,000 voting-age adults was carried out from Jan. 9 to 11.

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### **GOVT OFFICIAL: FAMILY SUPPORT 'INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE'**

Fresh research shows that family support is a paramount investment in the future, a government official said on Friday. Hungarian family policy aims to further bolster families and the future of youth with a view to beating an easier path to prosperity, Ágnes Hornung, state secretary for families at

the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, told a conference organised by the Mária Kopp Institute for Population and Families (KINCS), presenting findings of the Hungarostudy 2021 research project. The National Talent Programme aids 300,000-350,000 young people each year, she said, mentioning free language tests and exemption from social taxes for under-25s, which translates to extra annual income of 780,000 forints for each participant. People should not have to choose between studying and family or work and family, she said, noting the exemption from social taxes for women under the age of 30 who have children from January this year, as well as student-loan forgiveness for women who rear children after their studies are completed. Plus maternity aid is being extended until 2024, she noted. As the world "moves from one crisis to the next", it is vitally important that Hungary's family support system is being strengthened further, and solutions are now available for almost every situation in life, Hornung said. Hungarostudy research was launched 35 years ago by Mária Kopp and her colleagues, Tünde Fűrész, the institute's head noted, and the study provides the most comprehensive picture of the state of mind of Hungarians, as well as their relationship with family and the community.

The 2021 survey is the joint work of the institute and Semmelweis University's Institute of Behavioral Sciences, involving interviews with 7,000 people on the basis of which

27 studies were produced. Fűrész said young Hungarians are keen on having more than two children and they consider marriage to be the most ideal form of cohabitation, with the level of relationship satisfaction highest for married people.

### **SOME 13,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY**

Fully 6,070 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 6,911 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 196 people, ORFK said on Friday.

### **HUNGARY INAUGURATES HUF 4.7 BN SUPERCOMPUTER**

A 4.7 billion forint (EUR 11.9m) supercomputer was inaugurated at the centre of the Government IT Development Agency (KIFU) on the campus of the University of Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, on Friday. The supercomputer, dubbed Komondor, after the robust Hungarian sheepdog breed, has a computing capacity of 5 petaFLOPS. Around three-fourths of the computer's capacity will be made available to researchers around the country, while up to a quarter of capacity will be

available to businesses, KIFU chairman Endre Spaller said. The computer could be used for tasks in climate research, telecommunications, public transport, energy, health care, material sciences or the automotive industry, he added. The Komondor can be expanded, Spaller said.

### **HUNGARY INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 0.5% YR/YR IN NOV**

Hungarian industrial output increased by an annual 0.5% in November, slowing from growth of 5.9% in October, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) confirmed on Friday in a detailed reading of data. Output of the automotive industry grew by an annual 23.3%, slowing from a rise of 32.1% in the previous month. Output of the computer, electronics and optical equipment segment dropped by an annual 3.7%. Output of the food, drinks and tobacco segment fell by 2%.

Adjusted for the number of working days, output increased by 0.8%. Output for the January-November period grew by an annual 6%. Month on month, output fell by 0.7% based on seasonally and working day-adjusted data.

### **HUNGARY DEC ANNUAL INFLATION 24.5%**

Annual inflation in Hungary was 24.5% in December, up from 22.5%

in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Month on month, inflation was 1.9%. Food prices grew by an annual 44.8% in December, with the price of bread up 81.1% and egg prices up 82.7%. Household energy prices increased by 55.5%, with gas prices up 97.8% and electricity prices increasing by 27.8%. Consumer durable prices rose by 13.6%, while the price category that includes vehicle fuel was up 22.6%. Core inflation, which excludes volatile fuel and food prices, was 24.8%.

### **BIRD FLU VIRUS DETECTED IN BUDAPEST, SE HUNGARY**

National food safety authority Nébih has confirmed the presence of the H5N1 bird flu virus at an animal shelter in Budapest and at a duck farm in Békés County, in the south-east, the authority said on its website on Friday. According to Nébih, the birds in Békés had not showed any symptoms and the virus was detected through a routine check before culling. At the Budapest shelter, samples were taken after birds suddenly died at the facility, the authority added. Restrictions and mandatory examinations are in place in Bács-Kiskun and Csongrád-Csanád counties, and poultry must be tested before transport nationwide, Nébih noted.