

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Tamás Kovács

Hungary's handball team celebrating a 30-28 victory over Iceland in a qualifying match for the world championships

UPCOMING EVENTS

European Parliament holds plenary session

Stats office releases construction figures for Nov

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SPOX: HUNGARIANS REJECT EU SANCTIONS

Fully 97% of the 1.4 million voters participating in the government's National Consultation public survey have rejected the European Union's "detrimental" sanctions against Russia, a government official has said.

Sanctions have failed to stop the war and have caused Europe "extreme economic difficulties", government spokeswoman Alexandra Szentkirályi said on the government's Facebook page. "A sweeping majority of Hungarians reject sanctions on oil imports and gas, as well as [any putative] restrictions in connection with nuclear energy," she said. Participants have also "said a definite no" to further sanctions that could end up putting further upward pressure on food prices and pressure on European tourism, the spokeswoman added. The outcome of the survey is a "guideline" for Hungarian decision-makers, and "we are determined that people in Brussels should also listen," Szentkirályi said. "The message of the consultation is clear: Brussels's sanctions policy must be revised. Early peace talks are needed rather than ill-advised sanctions," she said. Details of the results will be published soon, Szentkirályi added.

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**GOVT OFFICIAL:
HUNGARIANS WANT FEWER
COSTLY SANCTIONS, MORE
OF A SAY**

Regarding a report that the EU is mulling a 10th package of sanctions covering nuclear energy, a government official told public radio that ordinary Hungarians had made their views clear: they want fewer costly sanctions and their opinions to be heard. Parliamentary state secretary of the Prime Minister's Office Csaba Dömötör said in an interview to Kossuth Rádió on Sunday if sanctions applied to nuclear energy, countries such as Hungary that heavily rely on nuclear energy would pay a high price. A recent National Consultation survey found that 97% of respondents were set against any kind of sanctions on nuclear energy, gas and oil, Dömötör said, adding that the sanctions against Russia had failed to bring any closer an end to the war, yet Europe's economies were increasingly suffering as a consequence of the sanctions. He said economic growth in the European Union as a whole would struggle to rise above zero because of the energy situation and concomitant sanctions. He added that the European Commission president reckoned that Europe face a gas shortage of 30 billion cubic meters this year. Dömötör said leaders would come under great pressure from citizens to change direction. Hungary's energy bill is increasing from 7 billion euros to 17 billion, and the government is having

to fork out 2,600 billion forints to pay for the subsidy on energy bills, he said. Even so, the government is pressing ahead with expanding family benefits, and an agreement has been reached on the minimum wage, he said, adding that pensions were also being raised. If inflation outpaces the pension increase, a pension supplement will be awarded, he added. The official also said that nurses' wages will be raised in July, and teachers can expect a 10% increase. If Hungary's EU funding is unblocked, then teachers can expect a raise of 21% this year and increases amounting to a combined 75% over the following two years. Dömötör said real wages had gone up by more than 4% last year. The government wants to see inflation brought to below 10% by the end of the year, he added. On the subject of the withdrawal of EU Erasmus funds, he said the Hungarian government had accepted demands made by the European Commission, and parliament adopted 17 amendments in the autumn accordingly. "Now they're coming up with new conditions..." he said. Hungarian students, he added, will not be put at a disadvantage as the government is ready to step in and make up for any Erasmus funds that are withdrawn in 2024.

**SZÁZADVÉG: HUNGARIANS
AGAINST WITHHOLDING
OF EU FUNDS**

Fully 74% of Hungarians object to the EU withholding funds from Hungary, the Századvég Foundation said on

Saturday. The think-tank's latest survey also shows that 60% are of the view that the EU is not even making an attempt to strike a compromise or reach an agreement with the government to unlock the funding, but wants to punish Hungary instead. Regarding perceptions of double standards in the European Union, 64% of respondents thought the EU applied different yardsticks to Hungary compared with other member states, Századvég said in a report on its survey.

**AZBEJ CALLS FOR
INTERNATIONAL ACTION
AGAINST PERSECUTION OF
CHRISTIANS**

Tristan Azbej, state secretary at the foreign ministry, has called for "an active stance" by the international community to fight the persecution of Christians, in connection with reports that terrorists attacked a Catholic parish in Nigeria and murdered the local priest there on Saturday night.

The brutal murder happened at Kafin-Koro town. According to the reports, the Reverend Isaac Achi was burned alive, while his assistant was rushed to hospital with gunshot wounds. Azbej said condolences were not enough, and the international community should take proactive steps. He said politicians in the West "must stop their denial", adding that "a dozen Christians a day are not murdered because of climate change or local clashes, but because of their religion." Referring to the Hungary

Helps programme through which the government provides assistance to Christians in Africa subject to terrorist attacks, the state secretary noted that in recent years the government has supported internal refugees in cooperation with the Catholic and Protestant churches of Nigeria, providing health care services to the victims of terrorist attacks, contributions to the reconstruction of ruined churches, schools, and homes, as well as scholarships to Christian youth.

Azbej also expressed his sympathy with the families of victims that died in a blast that shook a church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during a service on Sunday. At least six people died and 15 were injured in the blast that happened in Kasindi town, in the east of the country.

DK PROPOSES COMMITTEE SESSION OVER ERASMUS ISSUE

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has proposed convening parliament's cultural committee to discuss the European Union's withdrawal of Hungary's Erasmus higher education funding, DK MP Olga Kálmán told an online press conference. Kálmán said the European Commission had warned the Hungarian government in advance that "Hungarian universities cannot be controlled by foundations associated with ruling Fidesz", and insisted that "neither Prime Minister Viktor Orbán nor Fidesz politicians sitting on the boards of trustees of

universities care." Kálmán, a deputy head of the committee, said she wanted the body to hear the interior, regional development, and justice ministers on the matter of "how many researchers they have destroyed and how many dreams of students they have smashed". "DK wants to know when all Fidesz politicians have resigned from their positions on the boards of trustees," she said. DK is working to ensure that Hungarian universities can again participate in the international higher education programme and Hungarian students have access to student exchange schemes, she said.

UNIVERSITY HEADS: PARTICIPATION IN EU MOBILITY SCHEMES 'MUST BE GUARANTEED'

EU education, research and mobility schemes must be guaranteed to everyone participating in Hungarian university life, regardless of who runs the university, the Hungarian Rectors' Conference (MRK) said at the weekend. Fully 63 higher education institutions operate in Hungary, run by either the state, churches, private institutions or public foundations, the MRK statement said. Any political debate that ends up curbing participation of Hungarian university students or lecturers in the EU's education, mobility and research programmes is "unacceptable", it added. These schemes must be available equally to all university students, lecturers and researchers of all EU countries without exception, the statement said.

SOCIALISTS PROPOSE REDUCING VAT ON BASIC FOODSTUFFS

A gap of more than 10% exists between the pension increase and inflation, and VAT on basic foodstuffs should be reduced to zero, a Socialist politician said on Friday. Official statistics show that the inflation rate based on the consumer basket of pensioners was 26.5% in December, Lajos Korózs, the party's deputy leader, said at an event streamed on his Facebook page. Meanwhile, retirees are receiving a 15% pension increase, meaning that pensioners "will again be lending to the government for months", he added. More than 1.1 million pensioners live on monthly pensions of 80,000-160,000 forints (EUR 202-404), he said, calling on the government to reduce VAT on basic foodstuffs to zero% and that on household energy to 5%.

UNIONS URGE GOVT TO DROP DECREE 'INTIMIDATING' TEACHERS

The Federation of Hungarian Trade Unions (MASZSZ) has called on the government to withdraw a recent decree under which employers could dismiss protesting teachers even months after the protest action. The decree was clearly "aimed at blackmailing and intimidating teachers", the federation said in a statement on Sunday, adding all

unions were “shocked that the sword of extraordinary dismissal could hover over the head of a teacher that has expressed open protest just once.” The government “won’t deal with the situation in education or find a solution to the problems of teachers [by resorting to such a measure]. Instead, they are demonstrating power in an effort to stifle actions,” the statement said. MASZSZ head Róbert Zlati said his federation supported teachers and students “protesting for a great, common cause: for high quality and free education”. Zlati said the decree’s justification was “extremely cynical” when it said the new rules would benefit “rebellious” teachers because they would be “offered an opportunity to work with the children entrusted to them to the end of the school year”. According to Zlati, the aim of the earlier rules, under which employers had 15 days to dismiss violators, was to ensure that employers would not leave teachers in suspense over a long period of time. “Removing that barrier offers a great opportunity to

employers to blackmail or intimidate the employee,” he insisted. He noted that the new deadline for employers to decide if they want to sack a protesting teacher is August 1 each year.

NEARLY 16,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SAT

Fully 5,329 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 10,394 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 211 people, ORFK said on Sunday.

PHILOSOPHER GÁSPÁR MIKLÓS TAMÁS DIES AGED 74

Philosopher and writer Gáspár Miklós Tamás has died at the age of 74, literary website litera.hu announced on Sunday. A key figure of the democratic opposition in the era of Communist leader János Kádár, the

academic-turned politician took part in a meeting of opposition groups in Monor in 1985 and went on to become an MP of the Free Democrats in Hungary’s first post-communist, freely elected parliament from 1990-1994. He headed the party’s National Board between 1992 and 1994 before quitting the liberal party in 2000. From 1989, Gáspár Miklós Tamás was associate professor at the Department of Philosophy at Budapest’s ELTE University before becoming a senior associate at the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Since 2007, he was a visiting professor at the Central European University (CEU). He later became involved in environmental politics. In 2005, Gáspár Miklós Tamás was awarded the Middle Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary “in recognition of his outstanding scientific and educational work, as well as his activities in journalism and public life”. In 2016, he returned the award. In 2020, he was made an honorary citizen of Budapest.