

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zsolt Czeglédi

Winter aconite blooming in Debrecen, E Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

European Parliament holds plenary session

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

EAST-WEST COOPERATION IN CENTRAL EUROPE'S INTEREST

Central Europe has always lost out on conflict between geopolitical blocs, and so sees faltering cooperation between East and West as "the worst possible news", Péter Szijjártó said at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Hungary and the region has a vested economic and national security interest in pragmatic cooperation between East and West based on mutual respect and advantages, the ministry quoted the foreign minister as saying. That project has been up in the air since the end of 2021, along with Eurasian cooperation, a sound baseline for cooperation up to then, he said. To reverse that process, "mutual respect will [need to] return into international politics -- unfortunately, we have seen a total lack of mutual respect. Second, everyone should understand that physical realities cannot be overridden either by political approach or by ideology ... Communication channels will have to be kept open between those who are not very happy to talk to each other," he said. Regarding globalisation, Szijjártó said international powers had used it to "aggressively spread their political narratives" worldwide, and stigmatised non-mainstream opinions in the process.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: C EUROPE IN FOR WORSE TIMES AHEAD

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said at the World Economic Forum in Davos that central Europe could see much worse times than the cold war in the coming period. "It might look different from hundreds or thousands of kilometres away, but Russia is part of reality, the closer we are to it, the more it is a reality," he said. Maintaining channels of communication is key, "or the world will give up every hope" of peace in Ukraine, he said.

Regarding tensions between the US and China, Szijjártó said there were "political efforts" to wean the western economy off China, but they had not affected the private sector. He pointed to Hungary as an example, which he said had become a "European hub" for the transition to electric mobility. Seven of the 10 largest manufacturers of batteries for electric cars are Chinese, and they are indispensable for Western car companies, he said. Asked whether the Hungarian government was trying to make its "infringements on human rights" acceptable by making the country indispensable to European car manufacturing, Szijjártó said: "Our government is clearly not one of the liberal mainstream; it is right-wing, patriotic and Christian Democrat, which is unusual in Europe. The liberal mainstream will always criticise the leadership because of that, but they

have to respect the fact that the ruling parties won landslide victories in the past four elections."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY GUARANTEED TO DRAW RECORD INVESTMENTS IN 2023

Hungary's government is set to announce hundreds of billions of forints worth of new investments in the coming period, guaranteeing that the country will again draw record investments this year, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said in Davos on Tuesday. The world's biggest companies all speak highly of Hungary's investment environment, Péter Szijjártó said after meeting executives from Coca-Cola, LEGO, Apollo Tyres, AstraZeneca, Dell Technologies and Greenlabs on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum, according to a ministry statement. "LEGO, Coca-Cola, Apollo Tyres and AstraZeneca are all companies that are counting on Hungary as a global or European research and development centre," Szijjártó said. Most of them have investments in Hungary and plan to make new ones, he added. The world's top companies value Hungary's political stability and low taxes, and speak highly of Hungary's well-trained and loyal workforce, the minister said. "I can confidently say after today's talks that Hungary will again attract a record volume of investments this year, just as it did last year," Szijjártó said. "Although it's only January -- and it may seem like we're speaking too soon -- but having

seen, and being familiar with, the talks held again today, we're going to be able to announce hundreds of billions of forints worth of manufacturing and R&D investments in Hungary in the coming period," Szijjártó said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY-ISRAEL TIES LOOK AHEAD TO SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Relations between Hungary and Israel appear promising in the year ahead, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said after meeting Eli Cohen for the first time in his new capacity as foreign minister. Szijjártó said on Facebook that they had worked together previously, when Cohen was responsible for economic affairs. "I congratulated him on Likud's election win, for which we were great cheerleaders," Szijjártó said, adding that they also underlined the importance of the two countries' strategic alliance and friendship. The Hungarian minister told his counterpart that Hungary would carry on doing its utmost to ensure that Israel does not have to contend with unjust attacks or unfair treatment in international forums, and he pledged that Hungary would not ever vote for "anti-Israel resolutions". Szijjártó said he was "proud" to have been the only European foreign minister present in Washington, DC when the Abraham Accords were signed a few years ago, and he reaffirmed Hungary's support, saying the accords were the first sign of hope in decades that peace could be within reach in the Middle East. Szijjártó also said: "Hungary's Jewish community and

the Hungarian diaspora in Israel unite us". The ministers also agreed to pursue economic, investment and technological cooperation.

ORBÁN EXPRESSES SYMPATHY TO FAMILY OF DECEASED SLOVAKIA HUNGARIAN POLITICIAN

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has expressed his sympathies to the family of Miklos Duray, a recently deceased ethnic Hungarian politician in Slovakia.

Duray was not afraid to raise his voice in the interest of ethnic Hungarians even when this led to prison and hardship, Orbán said in a letter. He was among the first to say that ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia were not a minority but a member of the Hungarian nation, Orbán added. "We will always be grateful to him because it was thanks to his initiatives such as the Hungarian Permanent Conference -- long considered impossible -- were implemented," Orbán said.

Duray died aged 77 on December 30, 2022, after a long and serious illness.

FINMIN: GOVT TO FOOT ERASMUS COSTS FROM BUDGET

Should negotiations with the Economic Commission fail, Hungary will bear the costs of the Erasmus student grant programme, Finance Minister Mihály Varga said on Tuesday in Brussels. Speaking after a meeting of EU finance ministers (ECOFIN), Varga

said the Swedish presidency prioritised strengthening the EU's capacity for action, and the examination of the payment of recovery funding Hungary is entitled to should be part of that process, he said. "Hungary has fulfilled all the EC's requirements; it has reached an agreement with it, and the government is working to remove all obstacles in the way of the funding payments," he said, adding that the EC's approach regarding the Erasmus programme was "unfathomable". Despite the fact that the area of education policy is a competency of EU member states, and the establishment of university foundations has been going on for the past decade, the EC is now criticising the Hungarian practice, he said. Meanwhile, several member states have entrusted the operation of universities to foundations, and several MEPs sit on the boards of those institutions, he said. "The EC seems to have no objections to that," he added.

The ministers also discussed concerns regarding the US Inflation Reduction Act. Hungary sees the regulation as dangerous to EU competitiveness as it slashes taxes on US electric cars and batteries, putting those manufactured in the EU at a comparative disadvantage. "Europe is already at a competitive disadvantage due to the war and sanctions; we cannot allow that to go any further as it would harm European and Hungarian competitiveness and cost us jobs," he said, adding that Hungary's government was working to preserve the country's competitiveness.

SZÁZADVÉG: MAJORITY OF HUNGARIANS SAY EU SHOULD SEEK COOPERATION, COMPROMISE

Six out of every ten Hungarians say that Brussels should seek cooperation and compromise with Hungary over its funding, and it has no right to withhold the payment of European Union resources allocated for member states, the Századvég Foundation said. The think-tank's latest survey involved interviewing 1,000 people in early January to gauge public opinion about the payment of cohesion and recovery funds "rightfully due" to Hungary, the statement said. The survey showed that 60% of Hungarians believe the EU is an alliance of free and equal countries, and "Brussels has no right to withhold financial resources, even partially, but should seek compromise".

FIDESZ MEP: RESTORING EU UNITY PRIMARY TASK

Mainstream European Union policies have "demolished" the bloc's unity, and the next task to restore that unity, Tamás Deutsch, an MEP of ruling Fidesz party, said on Tuesday. Speaking on the sidelines of the European Parliament session in which the working programme of the Swedish presidency was presented, Deutsch said that by "backstabbing" member states protecting the common borders against illegal migration, the EU had

started to “dismantle European unity”. The “political witch-hunt” under the pretext of rule-of-law procedures was another step in this direction, he said. Those procedures were clearly a form of “political pressure and blackmail,” he added. “We will have to work to restore the EU’s unity that Brussels has dismantled,” Deutsch said. That hinges on all EU institutions adhering to EU treaties and respecting the bloc’s cultural and political diversity, he said.

Regarding the Swedish presidency’s programme, Deutsch said Hungary was on board with the importance of protecting the rule of law. Regarding corruption charges against several MEPs, Deutsch said the EP had “significant resources” at hand to investigate the bribery cases, “but they are shooting at sparrows” by using them “in connection with alleged corruption cases in member states”. Meanwhile, the accused MEPs have been in regular contact with the Hungarian opposition, he said. Fidesz MEPs will propose introducing the Hungarian asset declaration form to the EU, he said. As the EC itself seems to think the Hungarian legal system is able to combat corruption, its implementation in the EP may help similar efforts there, he added.

DK CALLS FOR CONVENING PARLT EU AFFAIRS CTTEE OVER ERASMUS GRANTS

The opposition Democratic Coalition has called for parliament’s European affairs committee to be convened after

the European Commission excluded some Hungarian universities from its Erasmus programmes. The EC has initiated excluding universities that participated in the government’s structural reforms, deputy leader Balázs Barkóczy told a press conference. He insisted the reason was that despite the EC’s warning, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán “decided to line his ministers’ pockets with a couple of million forints”. The committee would hear János Csák, the minister for culture and innovation, and regional development minister Tibor Navracsics, he said.

MORE THAN 9,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 4,839 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 4,294 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 203 people, ORFK said on Tuesday. Budapest received 46 people, 25 children among them, by train.

ALBANIAN NATIONAL CHARGED WITH SMUGGLING OVER 10 KG OF DRUGS

The Bács-Kiskun County prosecutor’s office has charged an Albanian man with trying to smuggle over 10 kg of heroin, morphine and codein from Albania, the prosecutor’s office said.

The man attempted to smuggle the drugs from Albania to France but was arrested on the Serbian-Hungarian border. He was charged with attempt to traffic significant amounts of addictive substances.

NBH BUSINESS CONFIDENCE INDEX EDGES HIGHER IN DEC

The business confidence index of the National Bank of Hungary (NBH) rose to -5 points in December from -7 points in the previous month. The gauge of companies’ outlooks climbed to +1 point from 0 point, and the measure of their assessment of the current situation increased to -11 points from -14 points. The indicator for companies’ propensity to make investments slipped to +18 points from +24 points. The sub-index for headcount rose to +2 points from -3 points.

COMPETITION OFFICE SCRUTINISING TIKTOK, VIBER, GOOGLE

Hungary’s Competition Office (GVH) is probing certain services offered by TikTok, Viber and Google, the watchdog’s head said in an interview with Mediapiac.com. Csaba Balázs Rigó noted that little can be revealed of the details as the probes are ongoing, but he said the question in the case of Viber is whether users can pay for a service with their data. GVH’s analysis of TikTok’s practices suggest the video-sharing platform does not properly

inform users of the way their data is used, and issues have also been raised with regard to advertising, he added. GVH is probing Google to determine whether it is violating anti-trust rules by putting links to its own services, ahead of competitors', when users search for song lyrics, he said.

Rigó said many users fail to read the fine print in general terms of service contracts with online platforms and don't realise the extent to which their data is used, even though the value of that data "may far exceed" the size of subscriber fees.

RESALE FLAT PRICES FALL IN CAPITAL

The average price of resale flats in Budapest fell by 3.5% in the fourth quarter compared with Q3, according to real estate broker Otthon Centrum. Prices fell over 10% in the central 5th and 6th districts as well as in the leafy 12th district. Prices in upscale 1st district I dropped by 8%, while prices rose by 15% in the outlying 3rd and 5th districts. The average home price

was 963,000/sqm and as high as 1.2m/sqm in the 5th district. The price data do not include housing estates built during the Communist era.

RAOUL WALLENBERG PRIZE HANDED TO INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS HELPING DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

This year's Raoul Wallenberg Prize has been handed over to six individuals and a civil organisation that helps disadvantaged people and groups in Hungary. Presenting the prizes at the headquarters of Hungary's Jewish federation Mazsihisz on Tuesday, the Raoul Wallenberg Association recognised Cintia Szajkó, a grammar, literature and history teacher, for her work in teaching disadvantaged students in the village of Tallya, in north-eastern Hungary. János Orsós, a school founder, received the award for his 20-year pursuit of accessible, fair and equal education for Roma children. János Schiffer, a lawyer, received the

prize in recognition of his work in the National Association of Victims of Nazi Persecution.

Journalist György Vámos was recognised for opening a memorial room in honour of Carl Lutz, a Swiss diplomat who saved tens of thousands of lives during the Holocaust. Reformed Church pastor Gábor Szabó received the award for his role in promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation between the Reformed and the Jewish communities in Nagykőrös, in central Hungary. László Tóth, a teacher at Budapest's Apáczai Csere János Secondary School, received the prize for organising debate circles for young people, with a focus on acceptance and fighting racism. The prize was also handed over to Szeged's Ethnic Minority Association in recognition of its efforts to promote the cultural values of national minorities. The Raoul Wallenberg Prize, named after the Swedish diplomat who saved the lives of thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust, was awarded for the 15th time.