

PHOTO OF THE DAY



UPCOMING EVENTS

President Novák meets Croatian counterpart in Budapest

Presser on Veszprém European Capital of Culture events

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

MATOLCSY EYES LOWER INFLATION

If inflation starts dropping soon, and sustainably, interest rates can be eased, paving the way for a rapid economic turnaround based on green technologies, the governor of Hungary's central bank, has said.

At a meeting with the head of the competition office (GVH), Matolcsy said the central bank (NBH) would do everything possible to restore and preserve price stability. The competition office is well placed to support the swift restoration of price and financial stability, he said, adding that doing so was a "national strategic interest" since inflation was weighing on the country's growth, among other influences. The central bank has found that businesses were quick last year to pass on rising costs to consumers, he said. A prime objective is to ensure that the current downward trend in raw material prices is reflected in consumer prices just as quickly, he added. Product and service repricing has been intensive in recent years, and the competition office can help to ensure that the rate of inflation is set on a declining path, Matolcsy said. GVH head Balázs Csaba Rigó said the various branches of economic policymaking must be in lockstep on reducing inflation, and the competition office was using all the tools of competition regulation towards this goal.

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ORBÁN IN TALKS WITH HEAD OF ISRAELI CONSERVATIVE FOUNDATION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held talks with Amiad Cohen, CEO of the conservative Tikvah Fund Israel, in his office on Thursday, the PM's press chief said. Cohen is visiting Hungary at the invitation of the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH) and with the purpose of getting to know more about the work of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) and boosting Hungarian-Israeli right-wing ties in education and publishing. Orbán and Cohen's meeting was also attended by Balázs Orbán, the PM's political director and chairman of the MCC's board of trustees.

Tikvah Fund is a registered conservative non-profit foundation supporting Israel and Jewish conservatives. Its Israeli subsidiary, Tikvah Fund Israel, focuses mainly on promoting education with a conservative vision, the translation of books and training the next generation of conservative politicians.

CROATIAN PRESIDENT TO PAY OFFICIAL VISIT HUNGARY

Croatian President Zoran Milanović is paying an official visit to Hungary on Friday, the presidential Sandor Palace has said. Milanović, whose visit comes at the invitation of President Katalin Novák, will be received by his Hungarian counterpart with military honours at Budapest's Kossuth Square,

the statement said. Milanović will then lay a wreath at Heroes' Square before holding talks with Novák. The two heads of state will hold an international press conference after their talks. On Saturday, Novák and Milanović will address the official opening of the Veszprém-Balaton European Capital of Culture 2023 season in Veszprém, in western Hungary.

Commenting on his visit, Milanović accused Brussels of "terrorising Hungary". "Hungarian politics is different, but these democrats are terrorising them in a terrible way," the president told reporters. Milanović said he was looking forward to visiting Hungary and having talks "with those who aren't an enemy", adding that unlike other neighbouring countries, Hungary had never attacked Croatia. According to a statement by the Croatian president's office, Milanović is also scheduled to meet Prime Minister Viktor Orbán as well as representatives of Hungary's Croat community. He is also scheduled to visit Budapest's Croat Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary School and Dormitory. Milanović said that though he and the Hungarian government had some ideological disagreements, he was "one of the few who dare go there".

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, ECUADOR TO SIGN DEFENCE, HYDROCARBON INDUSTRY COOPERATION PACTS

Hungary and Ecuador are signing a defence and a hydrocarbon industry cooperation agreement with the

aim of preventing security risks and guaranteeing energy supply, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Quito. The world is facing severe security and energy supply crises, and the countries that build the broadest partnerships possible will be the ones to best cope with them, the foreign ministry cited Szijjártó as saying. "The more countries we cooperate with, the easier it will be to overcome the security and energy supply crisis," Szijjártó said. The defence cooperation agreement focuses on crisis management operations, the minister said, adding that there are around 1,000 Hungarian troops serving in peacekeeping and anti-terror missions worldwide, many of whom were serving together with Ecuadorian forces. "Obviously our geographical focus is the Western Balkans, but we also have a presence in the Middle East, Africa and southern Europe," he said. The aim of these operations is to prevent new armed conflicts and keep a lid on migration, the minister said, arguing that security risks were among the main causes of illegal immigration.

Meanwhile, the hydrocarbon industry cooperation agreement will give Hungary another option regarding maritime oil imports in case crude deliveries to Hungary via Ukraine are rendered impossible, Szijjártó said. Because energy supply problems are a global issue, geographical distances matter less and all global energy sources need to

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be taken into consideration, Szijjártó said. He noted that Ecuador was one of the biggest oil producers in Latin America, adding that its production rate of 140,000 barrels a day allowed it to contribute to diversification processes in distant parts of the world. Hungary's energy supply is secure, but it must be prepared for a scenario in which oil transits through Ukraine are rendered impossible, the minister said. "This would leave maritime deliveries as the only option, in which case we must consider one of the biggest Latin American sources of crude," he said. Another aspect of the agreement, he said, concerned the use of Hungarian technology in boosting the efficiency of oil extraction. Ecuador's government has decided to improve the efficiency of the extraction of existing oil fields rather than exploring new ones, Szijjártó said. For this, they need technologies of which Hungarian oil and gas company MOL is a leading provider, he said. Talks are already under way on the use of the solutions offered by MOL, he added. As regards bilateral economic cooperation, Szijjártó said Ecuador imported large quantities of food industry equipment from Hungary, adding that the country was also using Hungarian water purification equipment.

Szijjártó is scheduled to meet Ecuadorian Vice President Alfredo Borrero Vega, Defence Minister Luis Lara Jaramillo and Energy and Mines Minister Fernando Santos Alvite, among others, on Thursday.

GOVT OFFICIAL CALLS ON SLOVAKIA FM TO BE 'RESPECTFUL' WHEN TALKING ABOUT HUNGARIANS

Tamás Menczer, the foreign ministry state secretary for external relations, has called on Slovakia's foreign minister to be "respectful in how he talks about Hungarians". "It is known that Foreign Minister [Rastislav] Káčer is only comfortable when he regularly speaks of the Hungarian prime minister in appalling terms," Menczer said on Facebook. "But we must remind Slovakia's foreign minister that Viktor Orbán was elected by the Hungarian people with record support for the fourth consecutive term. The decision of the Hungarian people must be respected, even by the Slovakia's foreign minister." Menczer said Orbán was in favour of peace and against sanctions, noting that after the crises caused by migration and coronavirus, Hungarians had entrusted him with managing the current crisis as well. "This is the kind of stability that is not really characteristic of Slovakia," Menczer said. "Perhaps Foreign Minister Káčer would be better served focusing on his own country, which is constantly in a governing crisis."

GOVT OFFICIAL: ANTI- HUNGARIAN DECISIONS, ACTIONS IN W UKRAINE UNACCEPTABLE

Tamás Menczer, the foreign ministry state secretary for external relations,

has called on local leaders of the Mukachevo (Munkács) district, in western Ukraine, to "immediately stop anti-Hungarian atrocities" such as "harassment and stripping the ethnic minority of their rights". Menczer said on Facebook: "We do not precisely understand how anti-Hungarian decisions and measures help the war against Russia in Ukraine." He added that all anti-Hungarian decisions and actions were unacceptable. "We condemn what has happened". Menczer said it was important to note that "the unacceptable events" had all taken place in the Mukachevo district and not in other parts of Transcarpathia. He expressed hope that "we will not have to face" such anti-Hungarians measures anywhere else. "We call on local leaders to immediately stop anti-Hungarian atrocities," he said, adding that Ukraine's national leaders should "make every effort, without delay, to have the anti-Hungarian measures withdrawn and the status quo ante restored." Hungary expects Ukraine's leaders to make every effort to ensure that, despite the war, stability in Transcarpathia is maintained, the state secretary said. "If Ukraine wants to be a European Union member, then it is unacceptable to systematically harass an ethnic minority and strip them of their rights," he said.

FIDESZ MEP: 'ATTACK' ON ENLARGEMENT COMMISSIONER 'UNFAIR'

The "politically motivated attack" on Olivér Várhelyi, the EU commissioner

for neighbourhood and enlargement, is “unfair” as “his performance is extraordinary and he represents the EU’s official stance in official statements”, Fidesz MEP Kinga Gál said, responding to a passage in the European Parliament’s annual report on the implementation of common foreign and security policy which proposes an investigation into whether Várhelyi’s conduct constituted “a breach of the Code of Conduct for the Members of the Commission and of the Commissioner’s obligations under the Treaties”. The report also expressed concerns that Várhelyi possibly “deliberately seeks to circumvent and undermine the centrality of democratic and rule of law reforms in EU accession countries”. Gál said in a statement that the measure was “whipping up hysteria” against Várhelyi, “possibly to deflect from a corruption scandal in connection with a leftist politician.” She referred to a statement by the European Commission, saying that Várhelyi implemented the EU’s methodology prioritising respect for democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, and she called the resolution “an EP report typical of NGOs” which undermined the unity of EU foreign policy. “The extraordinarily unfair criticism levelled at ... Olivér Várhelyi, who has revitalised the EU’s enlargement policy, is unacceptable,” she said. “Anti-enlargement leftists” are accusing Várhelyi without presenting evidence, and possibly hobbling EU enlargement in the process, Gál said. Regarding member state candidates,

Várhelyi routinely considers practical and economically advantageous factors such as infrastructure and energy development, green transition and a readiness to contributing to key investments, she said.

FIDESZ MEP: ILLEGAL MIGRATION ‘REAL’ DANGER FOR EU

The real security threat to Europeans is illegal migration rather than far-right extremist groups, Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi said in Strasbourg after a European parliamentary plenary on “Terrorist threats posed by far-right extremist networks defying the democratic constitutional order”. He said left-wing parties “have been trying to prove for months that the largest danger for Europe are far-right extremists”. Noting that the number of crimes perpetrated by migrants was growing all over Europe, Hidvéghi pointed to a case in Germany in December, when a migrant stabbed two young women, killing one of them. MEP Ernő Schaller-Baross said the EP was “again” implementing double standards by only reacting to far-right atrocities. He called for a united European stance against all groups expressing their political opinions through violence.

DEREGULATION ROUNDTABLE MEETS FOR FIRST TIME

Hungary’s new deregulation roundtable met for the first time on

Thursday. Bence Tuzson, government commissioner for deregulation, told the meeting the body was tasked with making proposals to cut red tape and make rules simpler with the aim of increasing the country’s competitiveness and making life easier for its citizens. The government in 2010 was faced with “complicated and hardly practicable regulations making life difficult for law-abiding citizens”, he said, adding that it was necessary to simplify institutions and their rules. He added that several thousand regulations unnecessary for public administration had already been scrapped.

State Audit Office chief László Windisch, the roundtable’s co-chairman, said an overregulated legal environment “often makes it almost impossible to meet regulations”. The new body also includes the heads of the Authority of Regulated Activities, the Energy and Public Utilities Office, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Chamber of Attorneys, the Banking Association, the Agricultural Chamber, the National Tax and Customs Office, as well as the Digital Hungary Agency.

LMP TURNS TO OMBUDSMAN OVER MINE REGULATIONS

The opposition LMP party is turning to the ombudsman over a government decree which they say paves the way for open-cast mining in environmentally sensitive ecological corridors and protected areas. The

opinions of local communities in the affected areas of Recsk, Pilismarót, north of Budapest, and Madocsa, in the south, should be heard, board member Örs Tetlák told an online press briefing. The quality of life of residents should not be made secondary to profits, he added. "The Protection of natural resources, especially that of farmland, forests and waterways, is part of our national heritage under the constitution," Tetlák said. The party expects the ombudsman for the protection of future generations and his deputy to review the legislation and to advise parliament on aligning it with the Fundamental Law, he said.

MOMENTUM TO DELIVER AGGREGATORS, POWER INVERTERS TO BEREHOVE, KYIV

The opposition Momentum party is delivering 12 million forints (EUR 30,300) worth of power aggregators and inverters to Kyiv and Berehove (Beregszász), in western Ukraine, the party's deputy group leader said on Thursday. Momentum has raised more than 6 million forints through donations for Ukraine in less than two weeks, Márton Tompos told a press conference streamed on Facebook. The party will double this sum and spend it on three dozen pieces of equipment which it will deliver to Berehove and Kyiv, he added. Tompos said he will leave for Ukraine with Momentum leader Ferenc Gelencsér and MEP Katalin Cseh on Friday.

DK SUSPECTS SPYWARE MAKER'S PRESENCE IN HUNGARY

Spyware maker Cytrox is basing its activities in Hungary, an MEP of the opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has said, calling on the government to reveal whether it was aware of the issue. Sándor Rónai said Cytrox produces Predator, software "in the focus of several European wire-tapping scandals in recent years", through which the personal data of tens of thousands of people could be accessed. Rónai, who is also vice chair of parliament's Pegasus committee, asked if the government was aware "what the company in fact produces". He also asked why the company had selected Hungary for its activities and if the government had signed a deal with them, or was planning to place a spyware order in future.

NEARLY 10,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDS

Fully 4,710 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 4,850 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 181 people.

GOVT TO PHASE OUT REPORTING DUTY ON GRAIN EXPORTS

The government is phasing out the mandatory reporting of grain and oil seed exports, introduced in March last year in response to the war in Ukraine, the agriculture minister announced. The measure had been a response to the risk of large quantities of Hungarian grain flowing out of the country after Russia attacked Ukraine in February, István Nagy said. Hungary's food supplies are now secure, and the country can produce the grain needed, so the reporting duty will be phased out, he added. Last year, Hungary exported some 2 million tonnes of wheat and corn each, according to the data collected from the reports. Ukrainian grain exports have been growing since August 2022, and the demand for central European grain has fallen significantly since, he said.

BUDGET CTTEE HEAD CALLS FOR HEARING FINANCE MINISTER OVER 2023 BUDGET

The (Socialist) head of parliament's budget committee has called on the finance minister and members of the Fiscal Council to appear before the committee to discuss the amendment to the 2023 budget. Zoltán Vajda said in statement on Thursday that from the outset the Socialists had argued that the 2023 budget passed in the

summer was unsustainable and an amendment was needed. The budget adopted by decree in December, he said, was not a proper budget and public money was not being spent in a transparent manner. Until the new budget is adopted, it will not be clear how taxpayers' money is being managed, he added.

Vajda said clarity was needed regarding the fund for protecting energy subsidies and the purchase of Vodafone's Hungarian unit. Also, information is needed regarding "the stealthy introduction of the euro", as well as government support for Erasmus+, with funding for the latter already a part of the budget by decree, he said.

WIZZ AIR EXPANDS OFFERING TO DESTINATIONS IN TURKEY

Hungarian low-cost carrier Wizz Air has said it is expanding flights between Hungary and Turkey in the coming months. Wizz Air will launch a daily Budapest-Istanbul flight from March 31. It will operate three flights a week between the capital and Antalya from May 24, and two flights

a week between Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, and Antalya from June 10.

HUNGARIANS WANT TOUGHER MEASURES TAKEN AGAINST VIOLENT CRIMINALS - SZÁZADVÉG

A majority of Hungarians want tougher measures taken against violent criminals, according to a survey by the Századvég Foundation carried out in connection with last week's deadly stabbing of a police officer in Budapest. Fully 97% of respondents said they had heard about the killing of the officer. Altogether 93% said tougher measures were needed against those who commit violence against public officials. A total of 81% said those who commit violent crimes or murder and blame their actions on the influence of drugs deserved harsher punishment. Fully 68% said those who commit murder should not be allowed to claim mental health issues to get a lighter sentence.

Last week, a police officer on duty was stabbed to death and two others were injured in Budapest's 11th district. 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. A drug test on the suspect later confirmed the presence of drugs in his system.

VESZPRÉM, THREE COUNTIES ADOPT COOPERATION STATEMENT ON EUROPE CULTURE CAPITAL

Veszprém, in western Hungary, Europe's culture capital this year, and the assemblies of three counties in the region have adopted a statement on cooperation under the European cultural programme. Regional Development Minister Tibor Navracsics told the meeting the deal was "a joint commitment to the European initiative". Navracsics said Veszprém city and Somogy, Veszprém, and Zala counties were "the same community integrated through work, family ties, and everyday life", adding that the European initiative was "a good opportunity to build a joint future" for residents of the area of Lake Balaton and the Bakony Hills.hu