

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

M3 Deák tér metro station reopens after revamp

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Monetary Council holds rate setting meeting

EU General Affairs Council meeting

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS FOR EU TO FOCUS ON PEACEMAKING

The European Union should focus on peacemaking in Ukraine instead of sanctions that lead to nowhere and arms supplies worth hundreds of millions of euros, the Hungarian foreign minister said in Brussels on Monday.

The ministry said that Péter Szijjártó told a press conference during the break of an EU foreign affairs council meeting that the European Commission was already preparing a tenth package of sanctions against Russia and it was in an advanced state. Ukraine's foreign minister who joined the meeting via a video link called for sanctions against the Russian nuclear sector and the proposal enjoyed some support within the EU, he added. Nuclear energy is essential for Hungary's energy supplies, with the blocks in Paks securing one third of the country's electricity consumption, he said. A contract was signed about the plant's expansion nice years ago, he added. Experience from recent months showed that only those countries are safe from the point of energy supplies that can produce a significant part of their domestic energy demands for themselves, he said. "Hungary refuses to support any measure that would restrict nuclear cooperation with Russia in any way," Szijjártó added. Answering a question, he said that press reports suggesting that Hungary was planning to veto the EU financing of arms supplies to Ukraine were lies.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: UKRAINE'S INFRINGEMENT OF MINORITY RIGHTS WILL MAKE FUTURE SUPPORT HARDER

Decisions by Ukraine infringing on the rights of its Hungarian national minority will make it more difficult for Hungary to make the sacrifices necessary to support the country in the coming period, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels on Monday. "It seems that despite the start of a new year, the warlike attitude isn't changing and the same warlike atmosphere persists," Szijjártó told a press conference during a break in a meeting with his European Union counterparts. He cited, as an example, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's proposal for the bloc to provide another 500 million euros to finance the delivery of military equipment to Ukraine and contribute 45 million euros to a training mission for Ukrainian troops. "Our position is obvious: there must be peace as soon as possible," Szijjártó said. The farther away a country is located geographically from Ukraine, the less direct an effect the war will have on it, and it will have less of a commitment to achieving peace as soon as possible, the minister said. Every decision that may lead to prolonging or escalating the war is against Hungary's interests, Szijjártó said. "That's why we do not consider it a good idea to step up weapons deliveries while at the same time we're not blocking the European Union

from carrying out such decisions," he added. The minister also touched on the issue of "concentrated and severe attacks" against the ethnic Hungarian community in Ukraine.

Szjijártó condemned the firing of ethnic Hungarian school headmasters and teachers without justification and the requirement set for institutions to take down Hungarian national symbols. "All of these are signs of a severe and concentrated anti-Hungarian attack," he said. "All of this is unacceptable and not only we Hungarians but the European Union should also act against it. It is unacceptable for anyone to interpret this as a bilateral issue," he said.

PRESIDENT: HUNGARY W BALKAN COUNTRIES' BEST FRIEND

Hungary is the best friend of countries in the Western Balkans, President Katalin Novák said on Monday, at an international press conference held after meeting Željka Cvijanović, the chairwoman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Budapest. Novák welcomed that Bosnia and Herzegovina was granted an EU candidate status in December last year. "This process must not slow down, or stop," she said. The Hungarian president called the Western Balkans a highly important region which could be key in the future of Europe. "Western Balkan countries can count on us, they should be part of Europe, not only from the point of view of their history and set of values, but in

terms of their ideology and geographic location and from a legal and economic aspect," she said. Novák noted that they discussed the Ukraine-Russia war, illegal migration, economic cooperation and the demographic crisis. Cvijanović said Hungary served as a bridge for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Western Balkan region in building ties with the European Union. She thanked Hungary for "showing an understanding towards the Western Balkans that is rather uncommon in the EU". Cvijanović said she highly appreciated the good relations Hungary had built with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkan region and called important Hungary's commitment to building economic cooperation with the region.

CHIEF PROSECUTOR, INTEGRITY AUTHORITY HEAD DISCUSS COOPERATION

Péter Polt, the chief public prosecutor, on Monday met Ferenc Bíró, head of the Integrity Authority, to start preparations on a work agreement between their two bodies, the public prosecutor's office said. At the meeting initiated by Polt, the two officials also discussed the anti-corruption activities of the prosecutor's office and the work carried out so far by the Integrity Authority, the statement said. Outlining his office's anti-corruption measures, Polt noted the work of the central prosecutor of investigations whose main responsibilities include the handling of bribery cases. Polt

also presented the steps taken by the prosecutor's office in fighting corruption. He noted his office's cooperation with European criminal justice agency Eurojust, the European Union's anti-fraud office OLAF and the European Public Prosecutor's Office. Bíró briefed Polt on the activities of the Integrity Authority's anti-corruption working group comprising representatives of civil groups and government officials. The two officials agreed to draw up a work agreement on the cooperation between their offices in the coming period.

GOVT TO LAUNCH HUF 700 BN BUSINESS CREDIT SCHEME

Hungary's government will launch a 700 billion forint (EUR 1.8bn) subsidised credit scheme for businesses from February, the ministry of economic development said on Monday. Credit in the Baross Gábor Reindustrialisation Programme will be available to businesses, regardless of size, for investment or working capital loans. Rates for the credit will be capped at 6% for forint loans and 3.5% for euro loans, but will be even lower for investments that boost energy efficiency.

The ministry noted that commercial lending rates for businesses now stand over 20%. The ministry said the scheme will give businesses a chance to refinance a "large volume" of maturing 2.5% credit taken out in the framework of the Funding for Growth Scheme of the National Bank of Hungary (NBH).

The programme will be funded by Magyar Eximbank. The government is pumping around 3,000 billion forints in business credit into the economy this year in the framework of Magyar Eximbank, Hungarian Development Bank (MFB) and Széchenyi Card programmes, the ministry said.

MINISTER SIGNS STRATEGIC AGREEMENTS WITH 14 ORGS

Tibor Navracsics, the minister of regional development, signed strategic cooperation agreements with representatives of 14 organisations including business and agriculture associations and six universities, on Monday.

Addressing the ceremony, Navracsics said the objective was to find partners for the government in designing its regional development plan with the organisations contributing their expertise and experience. "The agreements aim professional cooperation as well as strengthening personal relations in the long term," he said. The minister earlier signed similar agreements with 13 other higher education institutions, 17 scientific, church, charitable, interest representation and civil society organisations, and 9 chambers of industry.

LMP INITIATES REFERENDUM TO GIVE CITIZENS SAY ON BATTERY PLANTS

Opposition LMP has initiated a referendum to make setting up battery plants conditional on local citizens'

consent. László Lóránt Keresztes, the head of parliament's sustainable development committee, held a press conference after submitting the necessary documents at the National Election Office. Protecting natural treasures and promoting national economic independence are key at a time of crises, he said. The government's decision to "turn Hungary into a battery manufacturing power" through political decisions goes contrary to those goals, he said. Battery manufacturing is also water and energy consuming at a time when those resources are in short supply in the country, he said. Keresztes insisted the government was not handling the environmental issues the battery plants have presented, and "took foreign investors' side" without gauging locals' views on the matter.

BUDGET DEFICIT REACHES HUF 4,753.4 BN AT END- 2022, MINISTRY CONFIRMS

Hungary's cash flow-based budget, excluding local councils, posted a 4,753.4 billion forint (EUR 12.1bn) deficit in 2022, the finance ministry confirmed in a detailed release of data on Monday. The deficit widened by 1,287.0 billion in December alone. The central budget deficit reached 4,611.5 billion forints at the end of the year. The social security funds were 405.8 billion forints in the red, while the separate state funds had a surplus of 263.9 billion. The full-year cash flow-based budget deficit target was 3,152.7 billion forints.

The ministry said the deficit was a consequence of measures to ensure the country's security and energy supply. Expenditures on pensions last year came to 4,791.5 billion forints, including an annual bonus equivalent to a full month's pension, increases to preserve pension value amid inflation, and a premium linked to economic growth. Budget revenue rose by 18.7% to 29,786.1 billion forints last year, it added. The budget deficit relative to GDP, calculated using the European Union's accrual-based accounting rules, reached 4.9%, in line with the target. Calculating with an extraordinary top-up of the country's gas reserves, the deficit could have reached 6.1% of GDP, the ministry said. Public debt relative to GDP fell to 73.5% at the end of 2022 from 76.8% a year earlier, falling more than expected, the ministry said.

SOME 10,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY

Fully 4,419 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 5,458 came to the

country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 141 people, ORFK said on Monday. Budapest received 80 people, 44 children among them, by train.

GULYÁS: 'CULTURE, LIKE PEACE, CONNECTS US'

Culture, by its nature, is like peace "in that it connects us", Gergely Gulyás, the head of the prime minister's office, said in Dunajská Streda (Dunaszerdahely) on Sunday, marking the Day of Hungarian Culture. "Culture ... does not destroy and tear us apart," Gulyás said at the commemoration organised by the Pazmaneum Association. "Neither does it rewrite history or names engraved on tombstones or events in history books". "When we nurture our culture, we thereby also nurture our cohesion. Every community has their own culture and every culture will only live as long as its community will make it thrive," he said.

Gulyás gave a brief summary of the history of the Hungarian national anthem Himnusz (Hymn),

commemorating the 200th anniversary of its composition by poet Ferenc Kölcsey, saying it "had been with Hungarians all along" throughout the nation's history.

NEW SECTION OF REVAMPED METRO LINE 3 INAUGURATED

Two downtown stops of the revamped Budapest metro line 3 were inaugurated on Monday, with the southern arm of the line fully operational from Kőbánya-Kispest to Deák Ferenc Square from later in the day. Regional development minister Tibor Navracsics said at the inauguration that the government and the Budapest municipality should "move past policy disagreements in strategic, medium-term and long-term plans". The city's development, raising the quality of services and the level of satisfaction of Budapest dwellers is "in our joint interest", he said. Mayor Gergely Karácsony said developing transport in the capital was also in the interest of suburb residents "and the country". Developing the national capital is a national issue as well as a municipal one, he said.