

PHOTO OF THE DAY



UPCOMING EVENTS

European Parliament holds plenary session

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ MEETS VATICAN FM

Hungary and Vatican State share the same views on peace in Ukraine, the protection of families and the support of Christians, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Vatican City on Wednesday.

Szijjártó met Bishop Paul Richard Gallagher, the head of Vatican diplomacy, the ministry said. The minister said Hungary and the Vatican agreed that the war in Ukraine must end as soon as possible. "We shall concentrate on brokering peace and offering our help as mediators or as hosts of peace talks; the world can always count on us," Szijjártó said.

Szijjártó and Gallagher also discussed support for persecuted Christian communities, which Szijjártó said counted some 360 million people worldwide. Hungary continues to support persecuted Christian communities, and has co-funded the reconstruction of churches in Mexico and Lebanon, he said.

Hungary has spent in the past years some 100 million dollars on supporting Christian communities worldwide, he added. "We helped some 1 million Christians in 60 countries," he said.

Szijjártó also had talks with Bishop Claudio Gugerotti, the prefect of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches, which focused on the difficulties of Eastern Catholic churches. He also visited the tomb of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI who died on December 31.

FIDESZ MEP ACCUSES LEFT WING OF RISKING FINANCIAL STABILITY

The left wing is risking the financial stability of Hungary and the region, a Fidesz MEP said on Wednesday. Enikő Győri said in a statement that in a European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs vote on Tuesday, "the left wing forced through its proposal concerning capital requirements which, if implemented, could make the currently stable banking sector more vulnerable in the European Union's eastern and central European member states."

Győri said it was "appalling" that Csaba Molnár, an MEP of the opposition Democratic Coalition, supported "a proposal that aims to weaken financial stability" in Hungary. "The banking sector in our region is dominated by subsidiaries of foreign, mainly western, European banking groups," she said.

"In line with the approved proposal, the parent banks in western Europe would be allowed to set a lower capital requirement in their subsidiaries," she added. Győri said this would weaken the protection of deposit holders and undermine financial stability in the region. She said that "the fight will continue" during talks between institutions "to enforce common sense and protect the interests" of central and eastern European countries, including Hungary. "Our chances are good because several member states hold a similar position to us..." she added.

MINISTER: HUNGARY MUST ENTER INVESTMENT- INTENSIVE ERA IN ENERGY SECTOR

Hungary must enter a more investment-intensive era in the energy sector, and the government plans to increase spending by five-fold in the next seven years compared with the past seven years, the minister for energy affairs said on Wednesday. Csaba Lantos said in an interview to news portal Index that investments must be focused in three areas: renewable energy, network development, and infrastructure that improves flexibility. Security of supplies, affordability and sustainability are the most important aspects of the current energy sector, he said. "Energy sovereignty is one of our greatest dilemmas because our country is one of the most dependent within Europe. We must move towards energy sovereignty, even if this is not the most economical solution in the given period," he added. Hungary's electricity consumption is currently 44 terawatt hours, and around 70% of it is produced in the country, but there is strong import-dependence, he said. According to current calculations, 68 terawatt hours must be reached by 2030 in order to meet total demand, which in itself represents a 55% increase, he added. Gas consumption dropped by 17% last year, which was a considerable success, he said. Within this, there was a 25% drop in December, in the heating season, which showed that households and companies were adapting to the situation, he added.

OFFICIAL: MEDIA 'STRATEGIC SECTOR', MATTER OF SOVEREIGNTY

The media is a strategic sector and a matter of sovereignty, Balázs Orbán, the prime minister's director of policymaking, told a conference on Wednesday, adding that media dominance heavily influences a country's way of thinking.

Addressing a conference organised by the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC), Orbán, who also heads the university's board of trustees, said that 70-80% of media in Western countries were owned by the state. Before 2010, this ratio was lower than 24% in Hungary, he said, adding that this put the country in a position of "terrible vulnerability". Now this ratio has increased to more than 50%, Orbán said. Yet "Western liberals" slam Hungary for a state of affairs which is "quite natural" in their own countries, he added. Orbán said media owners included Hungarian foundations, associations, individuals, including conservatives, socialists, liberals, and Hungarian churches, as well as the Hungarian state. He added that Hungary's media market had undergone an organic and healthy transformation. He insisted that in the Western media world, media and ideology were, "sadly", becoming more and more heavily intertwined, and he said Hungarians, post-1990, had known all too well how the media could become "the handmaiden of certain ideologies".

NATIONAL INFORMATION CENTRE: US NGO PAID OPPOSITION PARTY LARGER SUM THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

Action for Democracy, an American NGO, sent the opposition Everyone's Hungary Movement and associated organisations and businesses over 3 billion forints (EUR 7.6m), a higher sum than previously thought, according to the National Information Centre (NIK). The website of parliament's national security committee on Wednesday released transcript of evidence given by NIK head Brigadier-General Zoltán András Kovács suggesting that the total amount of funding provided by the American organisation was 3.174 billion forints, around 160 million more than previously stated. This funding was on top of funding from other sources totalling 1.1 billion, 900 million forints of which came from a Swiss foundation "with the same aims" as the American NGO, according to the transcript. Foreign financial funding sent to Hungary exceeded 4 billion forints, it added, with various political analysts and marketing specialists the ultimate beneficiaries among others.

FIDESZ MEP: EUROPEAN GAS PRICE CAP 'DANGEROUS, HARMFUL'

The planned European gas price cap would have a negative effect on gas markets, boost speculative activity, and it could undermine financial stability,

ruling Fidesz MEP András Gyürk said on Wednesday. Gyürk said in a statement that Fidesz had long maintained the position outlined in an impact study by the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), namely that the gas price cap will prove to be a harmful and dangerous measure. The cap was agreed on in December and is scheduled to come into force on Feb. 15. According to the study, the gas price cap could result traders quitting European markets en bloc, he said. "Additionally, the number of transactions carried out outside the gas market could increase, further reducing the transparency of gas markets and making way for speculation," he added. The study showed that the gas price cap has no influence on the price dynamics of natural gas, and a drop in prices could mainly result from favourable weather, gas storage capacities filled to a high level, and people's willingness to make sacrifices, he said. "It has become clear that various ideas from Brussels have proven unsuited to reduce energy prices. It is high time for Brussels to draw the salient conclusions and not to introduce gas price caps," he added.

BUDAPEST REPRESENTATIVES ADOPT 2023 BUDGET

Representatives of Budapest's City Assembly on Wednesday adopted a new budget, with the capital's districts to receive 232 billion forints (EUR 589.3m) of total revenue while the central metropolitan council will have 273 billion forints at its disposal. The

budget was approved with 26 votes in favour, 1 vote against and 3 abstentions. Revenues are set to increase by almost 193 billion forints compared with the previous year, with planned business tax revenue of 503 billion forints, late fees and penalty revenue of 1.4 billion, and tourism tax income of 15.6 million.

Budapest taxi fares are increasing by 10% from March 6, with the basic fare rising to 1,100 forints, the kilometre fee going up to 440 forints, and the minute fee to 110 forints. The City Assembly voted for the measure on Wednesday at the proposal of Gergely Karácsony, the city's mayor. The representatives of the Fidesz-Christian-Democrat group boycotted the vote. The lifting of the fuel price cap from December 2022 has led to a marked increase in costs for taxi drivers, according to the justification of the measure.

LMP DEMANDS COURT OFFICIAL ACCUSED OF GRAFT QUIT

The opposition LMP party has demanded the resignation of the head of the Hungarian Association of Judicial Officers, György Schadl, who has been accused of corruption. LMP politician László Lóránt Keresztes said in a Facebook video that it was untenable for ruling Fidesz and Christian Democrat MPs to keep Schadl in position. Speaking in front of the justice ministry, the LMP lawmaker noted that ruling lawmakers blocked his proposal made in November to replace Schadl, who has been in legal custody for more than a year, adding that he was

resubmitting his proposal to parliament. He called on Justice Minister Judit Varga to break her silence on the matter and confirm whether she had met Schadl in connection with former justice state secretary Pál Volner, who was forced to resign after it was discovered he had received bribes.

MOMENTUM INITIATES LOCAL REFERENDUM ON DEBRECEN BATTERY PLANT

A local council representative of opposition Momentum has initiated a local referendum on a Chinese battery plant planned to be built in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, the party said on Wednesday. László Mándi submitted on Monday a referendum question to be approved by the local election committee to give locals a chance to express their opinion on the battery plant, the statement added. The question reads: "Do you agree that no industrial establishment should be set up in the administrative area of Debrecen whose water demand exceeds average 130 cubic metres per hour?" Momentum said Debrecen city leaders of the ruling Fidesz party had pursued plans for the CATL battery plant without informing local residents or asking their opinion of about the project which would heavily tax local water supply and pollute the environment.

CLOSE TO 9,000 UKRAINIAN REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY

Fully 4,395 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 4,340 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 96 people, ORFK said on Wednesday. Budapest received 27 people, 18 children among them, by train.

HUNGARY GROSS WAGES UP 16.8% IN NOV

Gross wages in Hungary increased by an annual 16.8% in November, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Wednesday. Net average wages were 17.6% higher than a year earlier, the KSH said. In November 2022, the gross average wage of full-time employees was 563,600 forints (EUR 1,447), while net wages calculated with allowances averaged 387,800 forints.

HUNGARY RECORDS 627 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 29 DEATHS LAST WEEK

Fully 627 new Covid-19 infections were confirmed last week, while there were 29 fatalities in

connection with the virus, the Coronavirus Press Centre said on Wednesday. The number of active infections stands at 5,864, they said. Currently, 472 coronavirus patients are being treated in hospital, 11 intubated on a ventilator. Altogether 6,421,335 people have been vaccinated against the coronavirus, with 6,207,880 having received a second jab, 3,904,413 a third, and 420,687 a fourth. The number of registered infections since the start of the pandemic has reached 2,191,827 in Hungary, while there have been 48,658 deaths. Fully 2,137,305 people have made a recovery.

JANUARY SO FAR SEES RAINFALL POST-1915 RECORD

The last time Hungary witnessed such a deluge of rainfall in January so far was in 1915, the National Meteorological Service said on Wednesday. Three times the average amount of rainfall was seen in several places in the country owing to a series of Mediterranean cyclones. In Budapest, there were a few tenths of a millimetre more rainfall in January 1886 than in January up to the 23rd: 115.6 millimetres, while in January 2022, a mere 2.9 millimetres of rain fell in the capital.