

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Ipoly river flooding at Litke in northern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Day of Hungarian Culture marked

Culture Capital of Europe Veszprém
2023 grand opening

TOP STORY

DEFMIN DISCUSSES DEFENCE COOPERATION WITH SERBIAN COUNTERPART

Hungary and Serbia agree that peace in Ukraine is a priority, and that small and mid-size countries are especially vulnerable to the war's fallout, Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said after meeting Miloš Vučević, his Serbian counterpart, in Belgrade on Friday.

The ministers discussed cooperation opportunities between their countries and ministries. Hungary has consistently called for a ceasefire and for peace since the war started, Szalay-Bobrovniczky said after the talks. At the same time, this is the first time in the history of both countries when they had to react to changing security situations from the east and the south simultaneously, he said. Serbia is "the leading country of the Western Balkans", and the region faces ongoing security threats, Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. Tensions have escalated between Serbia and Kosovo lately, he noted. Hungary supports Serbia's EU accession because it would aid the stability of the region, he said. Hungary has sent troops to the region to improve stability, he said. "Hungary has significant troops in NATO's mission in Kosovo, and headed the force's command in the past year," he said. The commander's work "in a very precarious time and place" was praised by the Serbian, Kosovan and international communities, he added.

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CEE MINISTERS DISCUSS IMPACT OF UKRAINIAN GRAIN IMPORTS

Agriculture ministers of Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Romania have agreed to call on the European Commission to take steps to stabilise the internal grain markets in light of fast-growing imports from Ukraine, Hungarian Agriculture Minister István Nagy said on Friday. The ministers met on the sidelines of the International Green Weeks (IGW) in Berlin, the ministry said in a statement.

Although Ukrainian ports have been partially reopened in the past months, imports of grain and oily seeds to its western neighbours have grown. International traders have switched to Ukrainian products on traditional markets for Hungarian grain, and so demand has significantly fallen for the latter, he said. While input costs remain high, Ukrainian imports have depressed producers' prices, he said. The long-term presence of Ukrainian grain and seeds would cause "serious problems" in the European countries producing the same, he said, calling for a review of the market situation and for corresponding measures in the EU. The measures should aim to protect local farmers and the market balance within the bloc, while respecting EU measures to aid the export of Ukrainian produce, he said.

FIDESZ PROPOSES INTRODUCTION OF HUNGARIAN ASSET DECLARATION SYSTEM IN EP

MEPs of ruling Fidesz has proposed introducing Hungary's asset declaration system to the European Parliament in an effort to "put an end to corruption in Brussels and restore public trust". A statement issued on Friday said that Fidesz group leader in the EP Tamás Deutsch asked EP President Roberta Metsola and EP group leaders to consider the introduction of the Hungarian asset declaration system in order to improve transparency. In an effort to address European Union concerns, Hungary initially amended its previous asset declaration system by adopting the EP's system "word by word", Deutsch said. However, the European Commission then ruled that this was not acceptable and obliged Hungary to return to its stricter original system, which was then unanimously described by the EC, the EP and the Council of the European Union as a basic pillar of constitutionality, he added. Based on this, "we propose that the EP should introduce the Hungarian parliament's current asset declaration system" because since its reintroduction it has fully complied with the EC's constitutionality requirements and "it could certainly contribute to the elimination of corruption in the European Parliament", he said.

BUDGET AMENDMENT SUBMITTED TO PARLT

The budget amendment which contains measures to protect capped energy bills has been presented to parliament, the finance ministry said on Thursday. Despite the effects of the war in Ukraine "the government is not abandoning its primary goals of protecting Hungarian families, jobs, and the value of pensions ... This year, the government is also keeping caps on energy bills up the level of average consumption while reducing the public debt and the budget deficit," the ministry said in a statement.

Given the emergency situation, the government has amended the 2023 budget by government decree, bearing in mind guidelines already adopted by parliament and the backing of the Fiscal Council, and it has submitted the relevant bill to parliament, with a new revenue target of 36,358.4 billion forints (EUR 91bn), up from 31,073.7 billion, and a spending target of 39,758.6 billion, up from 33,425.8 billion. The deficit is set to widen to 3,400.2 billion forints from 2,352.1 billion, while the public debt is targeted at 69.7% of GDP, down from an estimated 73.5% in 2022.

The fund for protecting capped energy prices is set at 2,610 billion forints, up from 670 billion in the original law passed last July. Central budget support for the fund is set at 1,198.3 billion forints, while payments, contributions and windfall profit taxes

from companies in the energy, mining, telecommunications, airline and pharmaceutical sectors would cover the rest of the fund's expenditures. The fund for boosting the country's defence is unchanged at 842 billion forints.

The 2023 budget law targeted economic growth of 4.1% and annual inflation averaging 5.2%. The current bill assumes average annual inflation of 15% this year. The ministry said the bill seeks to raise reserves in the budget to 255 billion forints from 170 billion, adding that inflation is expected to fall to the single digits by the end of the year.

GOVT OFFICIAL: UKRAINE MUST MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO HAVE ANTI-HUNGARIAN ATTACKS STOP

Hungary expects Ukrainian leaders to make every effort to stop the attacks and atrocities suffered by ethnic Hungarians, Tamás Menczer, the foreign ministry's state secretary for external relations, said on public radio on Friday. Menczer reacted to reports that Hungarian flags and signs have been removed in Mukachevo district (Munkács), in western Ukraine, and the director of a local Hungarian school, István Schink, was sacked.

Before the war, "the ethnic Hungarian community was being stripped of their rights", he said, citing measures that restricted the use of their mother tongue and education

in Hungarian. "We always used to take firm action against this, but then the war broke out, and we said that since Ukraine was the attacked side in the war, we put aside the existing conflicts," he added.

At the same time, the recent developments must not be left unmentioned, he said. "All anti-Hungarian actions are unacceptable, but all of this happened in Mukachevo district and not in the whole of Transcarpathia," he said. "We very much trust that such anti-Hungarian actions will not be experienced elsewhere," he added. "We have called on local leaders in Mukachevo district to have the anti-Hungarian measures withdrawn and the status quo ante restored immediately, and told Ukraine's national leaders that we expect them to make every effort to ensure that local leaders act respectfully, and the attacks and atrocities against ethnic Hungarians are stopped," he said.

"Despite the war, conditions are reasonably calm in Transcarpathia and it would be very good if this remained the case," he added. He also said that if Ukraine wants to be a member of the European Union and follow European values then that is not compatible with stripping ethnic communities, or any minority, of their rights.

Menczer also reacted to criticism by the Slovak foreign minister about Hungary, stating that the Hungarian prime minister and the government had been elected by the Hungarian people, and if Rastislav Káčer keeps

insulting the Hungarian prime minister, then he does not accept Hungarians' decision, thereby he insults them.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: REOPENING OF HUNGARIAN EMBASSY IN ECUADOR GOOD DECISION

The reopening of the Hungarian embassy in Ecuador in 2015 was a good decision, which was also demonstrated by the 74% increase in bilateral trade volume last year, the foreign minister said in Quito on Thursday. The ministry said in a statement that during a joint press conference with Ecuadorian deputy foreign minister Luis Vayas Valdivieso, Péter Szijjártó said the world was facing serious difficulties and such crises can be best handled by countries that maintain comprehensive partnerships.

He praised Hungarian-Ecuadorian relations and said the reopening of the embassy in Quito eight years ago was a good decision. "We are proud that more than 170 students from Ecuador study in Hungary. We are proud that Hungarian companies are active in Ecuador in the areas of food industry, food security and water management," Szijjártó said.

He also said that he had signed bilateral cooperation agreements in defence and hydrocarbon industry earlier in the day. "We have agreed to connect our crisis management and prevention capacities in order to be able to prevent the outbreak of further armed conflicts around the world," he said. He also said that the deterioration

of the security environment was always among the number one causes of migratory waves.

Valdivieso expressed thanks to Hungary and personally to Szijjártó for Hungary being the greatest supporter of Ecuador's Schengen visa free status in the European Union. He also said that Ecuador viewed Hungary as a gateway in central and eastern Europe for the export of goods and plans to further develop bilateral cooperation.

BUDAPEST GROUP LEADERS ALLIED TO FIDESZ DEMAND LEFT- WING MAYORS JOIN SUPPORT FOR NEEDY

The group leaders of six Budapest districts allied to Hungary's ruling Fidesz party are demanding that left-wing mayors of their respective districts to pay out energy subsidies to

those in need, saying the mayors had refused to hold consultations with the government concerning the support.

By refusing to engage in consultations with the government on support schemes for the needy the mayors could harm their respective districts, the six Fidesz mayors said in a video statement on Thursday. The households in question could miss out on 30,000-40,000 forints (EUR 75-100) in various support payments, including for utility bills, the statement said.

Andrea Gyurakovics, Fidesz-KDNP group leader of the 9th district, said the left-wing mayors "refuse to admit their own responsibility and continue to point a finger at the government," she said. She accused the mayors of taking instructions from opposition DK leader Ferenc Gyurcsány to forgo hundreds of millions of forints in government support, "violating their mayoral oath" on their assumption

that "the worse it is for the people, the better it is for the left wing". She said the joint proposal of ruling-party group leaders is that mayors who failed to secure government support for energy compensation should pay all district residents in need 30,000 forints per person from their 2023 budget.

NEARLY 10,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 4,407 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 5,416 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 155 people, ORFK said on Thursday. Budapest received 26 people, 11 children among them, by train.