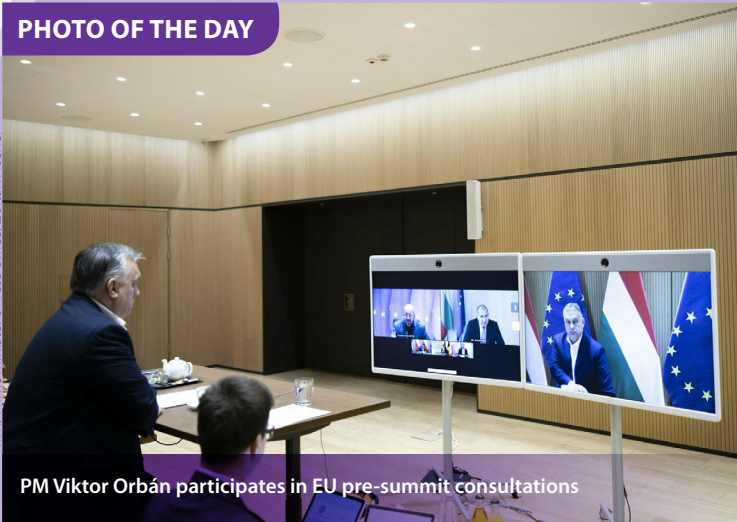


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

PM Viktor Orbán participates in EU pre-summit consultations

UPCOMING EVENTS

Finance ministry releases Jan budget report

Stats office releases prelim Dec 2022 foreign trade figures

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

HUNGARY TEAM PULLS THREE FROM QUAKE RUBBLE

A Hungarian search and rescue team in Türkiye has already rescued three people from beneath the rubble of a devastating earthquake that hit the country on Monday, Péter Szijjártó has said.

The foreign minister said all 116 personnel and 19 dogs sent by Hungary will soon be in the country. The Hunor rescue team was the first to arrive on Monday, he said, adding that its members are already assisting the search for survivors. The five trauma surgeons sent by the National Directorate of Disaster Management are also helping out at the region's university hospital, the minister said. Staff members of the Pest County Search and Rescue Service are also on the ground in Türkiye, and the ÉLETJEL Fire and Rescue Team will be arriving in the earthquake-hit region in the evening, Szijjártó said. Also, counter-terrorism force TEK will soon be sending 16 people, including five doctors and a nurse, to the area, he added. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said the foreign ministry was aware of 18 Hungarian citizens who were in the area affected by the earthquake. The ministry is in constant contact with them, he said, adding that they were all fine and had not asked for any major assistance. "Hungary is providing considerable help to Türkiye and the Turkish nation in this difficult time," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO SEND FURTHER AID GROUPS TO EARTHQUAKE SITE IN TÜRKİYE

A group of 55 rescue troops and two dogs of Hungary's National Directorate of Disaster Management arrived in Türkiye on Monday night and further aid is being sent to aid earthquake-hit Turkish regions, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. Three organisations were sending 46 rescue personnel and 15 dogs on Tuesday, with a 40 million forint (EUR 102,000) government support. Hungary is helping in all possible ways, he said. "Türkiye can count on Hungary." The foreign ministry is in contact with all Hungarians in Türkiye, seven of whom are currently in the earthquake-hit Hatay region, he said. "Everyone is well, we are in contact with everyone," he said, calling on people who know of further Hungarian citizens who might be impacted to contact the consulate or the Ankara embassy. Meanwhile, Hungary's government is earmarking 50 million forints for the Maltese Charity to send two mobile clinics to Syria, which was also impacted by the earthquake, he said.

The Hungarian Catholic Charity has sent a rescue team to earthquake-hit Türkiye in cooperation with Budapest's voluntary ambulance organisation and the capital's association of fire fighters. According to a Tuesday statement, the team consists of 19 people travelling in 5 vehicles. The team, which has a week's supply, will join partner organisations

in Türkiye and participate in search and rescue operations. The organisation welcomes donations at karitasz.hu, while people calling their hotline at 1356 can contribute 500 forints per call.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, SERBIA COOPERATING IN ENERGY SECURITY

Despite the Ukraine war's dramatic effect on the security of energy supplies, Hungary and Serbia "have helped each other preserve their energy security within friendly and strategic cooperation and will continue to do so in the future", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Belgrade. The war has seriously harmed both countries, he said. "Both Hungary and Serbia have an interest in achieving peace as soon as possible." "We regret that the rhetoric of war is far louder than the voice of peace and regret that a number of decisions and statements are currently made that pose a risk of prolonging and possibly escalating the war," he added.

At talks with Dubravka Đedović, Serbia's mining and energy minister, the ministers concluded that their countries had successfully coped with issues around energy supplies "in an extremely uncertain environment of energy supplies impacted by the war and related sanctions". Szijjártó said Serbia was a "fair partner in terms of imported gas transits", adding that Hungary received 4.8 billion cubic metres of gas last year via the Turkish Stream pipeline crossing Serbia. At the same time, Hungary stored 300 million

cubic metres of gas in its facilities for Serbia and is ready to extend last year's agreement and store another 500 million cubic metres in 2023, he added.

According to Szijjártó, the "most realistic scenario" for achieving long-term energy security through diversification of supplies was to import larger amounts of gas from Azerbaijan, which, in turn, required major infrastructure developments such as further pipelines and interconnectors in the region. He welcomed the upcoming completion of an interconnector between Serbia and Bulgaria, and announced that negotiations on a long-term gas purchase agreement with Azerbaijan are at an advanced stage. Gas from Azerbaijan could reach Hungary via Türkiye and Bulgaria and then via Romania or Serbia, he added. A current project aimed at doubling the capacity of electricity links between Serbia and Hungary is being implemented on schedule, Szijjártó said, adding that it would also contribute to the security of power supplies for both countries.

The Serbian minister highlighted "excellent cooperation" between Serbia and Hungary on the Balkan Stream gas pipeline construction, which ensures secure supplies to both countries.

POLISH OFFICIAL: COOPERATION WITH HUNGARY BOOSTS EU MEMBER STATES' SOVEREIGNTY

Though Poland and Hungary have their disagreements, cooperation

between the two countries is crucial to countering efforts aimed at restricting the sovereignty of European Union member states, the head of the Polish prime minister's office said on Tuesday. Poland and Hungary disagree on their policies towards Ukraine and Russia, but are building an alliance of countries that strive to protect their sovereignty within the EU more effectively, Marek Kuchcinski said, appointing the new members of the programme council of the Wacław Felczak Institute of Polish-Hungarian Cooperation. Besides the prime ministerial and government level, the two countries must also develop their cooperation in culture, science and on the level of social institutions, Kuchcinski added. He also underscored the importance of fighting disinformation concerning Polish-Hungarian ties.

ORBÁN ATTENDS VIDEO CONFERENCE AHEAD OF EU SUMMIT

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Tuesday participated in a video conference along with his Polish, Belgian, Finnish and Maltese counterparts, in preparation for a European Union summit starting on Thursday, the PM's press chief said. The summit will focus on the war in Ukraine, economic challenges and illegal migration. Orbán called for immediate ceasefire and peace talks in Ukraine and a "substantive political debate" on the EU sanctions against Russia. The "current situation", he added, warranted swifter

and simpler access to cohesion and reconstruction funds for member states. Regarding migration, Orbán called on the EU to support border protection because border "fences are protection for the whole of Europe".

VARGA: BELGIAN FOREIGN, EUROPEAN AFFAIRS MINISTER VISITS BUDAPEST

Hadja Lahbib, Belgium's foreign and European affairs minister, has visited Hungary, Judit Varga, Hungary's justice minister, said on Tuesday, noting that it was the first time the relevant Belgian minister had visited Budapest since 2011. Tasks under the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian EU presidency were the main subject of discussion as Hungary will assume the presidency in the second half of 2024 after Belgium, Varga said on social media. Varga emphasised the need to boost the European economy's competitiveness and for the EU to assume greater responsibility for its security. Hungary wants closer cooperation in defence policy and to strengthen the European defence sector's industrial and technological base, she said.

Lahbib agreed with Varga on the need to better coordinate EU migration policy with respect to movements beyond the bloc's borders. Regarding energy security and the war in Ukraine, Varga said Hungary's standpoint was straightforward: striving for a quick ceasefire and peace negotiations was preferable to sanctions.

On the subject of the rule of law, Varga stressed the importance of clarity. The rule of law in Hungary must not be judged solely on the basis of the opinions of biased NGOs, she said. Meetings such as the one she held with the Belgian minister were important, she added, so sides that were genuinely open to dialogue could familiarise themselves with and understand each other's positions. Lahbib, she said, had been an excellent partner in this respect and others.

LIBYA RECEIVES V4- FUNDED PATROL SHIP

Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush received the keys to the first patrol ship funded by the Visegrad Group, designed to curb people smuggling and patrol the Mediterranean shore, in Adria, in Italy, on Tuesday. Olivér Várhelyi, the European commissioner for neighbourhood policy and enlargement, said the 20 meter ship, able to carry 200 people, was the first to be fully funded by Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The Visegrad Group pledged in 2017 to deliver 4 ships to Libyan border patrol, he said. The ships will help to "curb illegal migration across the sea and to block a route which people smugglers and criminal organisations use to enrich themselves," he said. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, who also attended the event, said Libya was a key starting point for illegal migrants in Europe. The European Union and Italy also support the project in which Libya will have further 2 ships built by year-end and will receive two

used ones. Italy has trained Libyan border patrol troops and will oversee the maintenance of the ships.

EU COMMISSIONER: RULE OF LAW MUST BE PROTECTED ACROSS ALL SECTORS

Democracy, the rule of law, equality and fundamental rights form the foundation of the European Union, and they must be protected across all sectors ranging from government to civil society, the EU justice commissioner told a conference organised by the Brussels and Budapest city councils on Tuesday. The abandonment of the rule of law, which constitutes the legal foundations of the bloc and its member states, would mean the end of the European Union, Didier Reynders told the Cities for the Rule of Law conference in Brussels. Guaranteeing the rule of law and justice along common values is the basis of trust among member states, the commissioner said. The principle of the rule of law is non-negotiable and must not be allowed to fall victim to political compromise, he added.

Reynders noted that the European Commission had the means to protect the rule of law, such as its annual rule-of-law report in which the body offers recommendations with a view to encouraging member states. The report is also a tool used to address general problems and stop the deterioration of the rule of law, he said. The report forms the basis

of dialogue on the state of the rule of law with the individual member states and on improving the situation with the participation of local councils and civil society, Reynders said. The EC plans to publish this year's rule-of-law report in July, he said. Dialogue always comes first, although it is not always enough, the commissioner said. A firm approach is needed, he said, insisting that the rule of law was under attack.

Reynders said the EC was prepared to use all the tools at its disposal to protect the rule of law. These, he noted, include the mechanism in the EU budget linking funding to the rule of law, which in Hungary's case led to the suspension of cohesion funding for the country.

Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said the state of the rule of law was "a matter of life and death". He said Hungary was "very far" from meeting the requirements EU candidate countries were expected to meet. Karácsony said the tools established to protect the rule of law were "weak" and were being applied too slowly. He insisted this was a factor that had contributed to the emergence of a "hybrid regime" within the EU. He said Budapest and most European cities were better at meeting the requirements for democracy and the rule of law than central governments. Capital cities can be considered "islands of the rule of law" in countries where the rule of law and democracy are lacking, he added. But cities are under attack by means that include EU funding being withheld from them, Karácsony said.

He said European capitals needed to cooperate on the distribution of EU funds at the local level.

French Green MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield said Hungary and Poland were struggling with systemic problems when it came to the rule of law. She said the state of the rule of law had deteriorated so badly in Hungary that it was now hard to believe in an easy fix to the situation. Though it may seem like there is democracy in Hungary, the country is experiencing the slow establishment of "an authoritarian regime", she insisted.

OVER 7,500 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 4,175 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 3,380 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 68 people, ORFK said on Tuesday. Fully 55 people, 22 children among them, arrived by train in Budapest.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT UP 2% IN DEC

Output of Hungary's industrial sector rose by an annual 2.0% in December, picking up from 0.6% in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Tuesday. Adjusted for the number of workdays, of which there were two fewer in December

than in the base period, output rose by 5.7%. KSH said output of the automotive industry, Hungary's biggest manufacturing branch, "grew significantly", while output fell in most other branches, including the computer, electronics and optical equipment segment and the food, drinks and tobacco segment. KSH will release detailed data on output of the various segments on February 13. Month on month, output rose by a seasonally- and workday-adjusted 3.8%. For the full year, output climbed 5.8%.

ROSATOM: CONSTRUCTION OF PAKS 2 PLANNED FOR NEXT YEAR

Construction of the Paks 2 nuclear power plant is planned to start next year, Alexey Likhachev, Rosatom's chief executive, told journalists in Moscow

on Tuesday. "We will pour the first concrete next year," Likhachev said, responding to a question about the commencement of construction in Hungary. The Rosatom head said the pace of construction was in accordance with the contract, and this could speed up depending on the wishes of the client, otherwise the project would go ahead based on "current contractual obligations". Paks currently operates 4 VVER-440 reactors, while preparations are under way to build two new Rosatom-designed reactors, boosting capacity to 4,400 megawatts from 2,000 megawatts.

MINISTRY ISSUES COLD ALERT FOR THREE REGIONS

The interior ministry has issued a "red code" for three regions

in Hungary due to sub-zero temperatures, allowing special assistance to homeless people, State Secretary Attila Fülöp said on Tuesday. Under the measure, communal institutions must provide accommodation to homeless or needy people in south-eastern, northern, and central parts of the country in the next few days starting on Tuesday evening. According to the national weather service, nighttime temperatures could fall below -10°C. The state secretary warned that spending long periods of time outside in such cold weather could be dangerous and called on residents to contact the hotline of homeless shelters if they encountered rough sleepers. He added that shelters nationwide were 81% full, allowing room for further admissions.