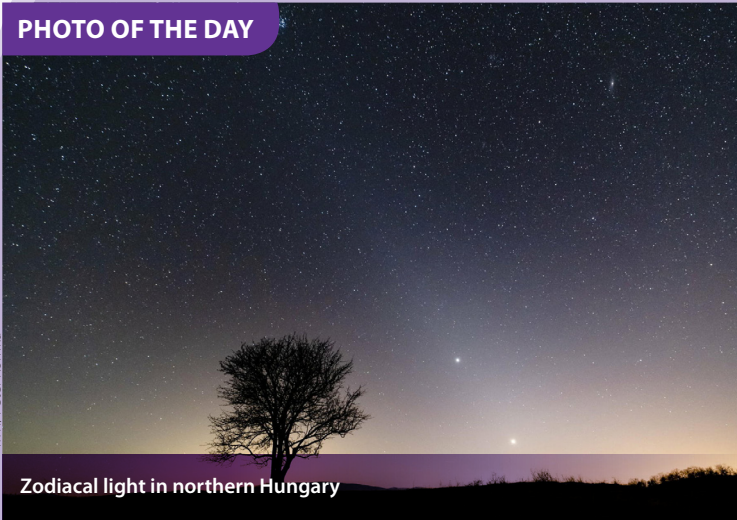


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Zodiacal light in northern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

EP holds plenary session

Stats Office presser on 2022 national census

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY GOVT CALLS FOR PROTECTION OF UKRAINE HUNGARIANS' RIGHTS

The Hungarian government has appealed to international institutions to ensure the protection of the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Strasbourg on Wednesday.

"This is a burning issue as a recent Ukrainian law will in fact eliminate ethnic minority schools in that country," the foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying. "We want to and we will protect the rights of ethnic Hungarian communities at all places in the world," Szijjártó said. Ukraine currently has 99 ethnic Hungarian primary and secondary schools, but under the new law they will become state schools as of September 1, "with some level of access" to Hungarian education, Szijjártó said. From grade four on, the ratio of classes held in Hungarian could be gradually decreased to 40%, while entry and final exams as well as vocational training in Hungarian will be eliminated altogether, the document quoted Szijjártó as saying. "Hungary stands by Ukraine... but we expect Ukraine to restore the rights of the ethnic Hungarian minority with regard to the use of their mother tongue," he said, adding that "we do not ask for any rights to Transcarpathia Hungarians they did not have earlier". "We want to restore the situation that had existed until 2015," he added.

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GULYÁS: HUNGARY 'DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE' TO HELP PEOPLE OF TRANSCARPATHIA

Hungary has been “doing everything possible” to help the people of Transcarpathia, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office, said in Sátoraljaújhely, in eastern Hungary, on Wednesday, adding that “each Hungarian bears responsibility for each and every Hungarian regardless of where they live in the world”. Gulyás told students and their teachers from Transcarpathia staying in the town that Hungary condemned Russian aggression and continued to do so, adding that Hungary is providing humanitarian aid to Transcarpathia, in western Ukraine, and elsewhere in the country.

Also, the country is providing financial support for the running of the Ukrainian state, as well as taking in refugees or allowing them to pass through Hungarian territory, he noted. Gulyás praised Ukraine’s “heroic struggle” to defend its territory, adding that it was in Hungary’s interest that Hungarians living in Transcarpathia should suffer as little as possible, so Hungary has refused to deliver weapons as doing so would endanger the people of Transcarpathia by making them a target.

DEFMIN: GOVT WORKING FOR HUNGARIANS' SECURITY IN NATO

The Hungarian government is working to ensure the security of Hungarians in NATO at a time of war and growing migration pressure, Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky told MTI after a two-day meeting of NATO defence ministers on Brussels on Wednesday. At the meeting, the ministers reviewed the state of strengthening defences of the alliance’s eastern flank, Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. Of the four new battle groups in the region, the Hungarian was the first to reach full operational capacity, he said.

Meanwhile, Hungary also considers the security of the Western Balkans a priority, he said. The country’s participation in international missions in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina has been “successful and appreciated”, he said. Hungary will have raised its defence spending to 2% of GDP by the end of this year, a year earlier than NATO’s deadline for the commitment, he said. The NATO summit in Vilnius in July may decide to further increase that ratio, he noted.

Regarding the war in Ukraine, the minister said: “We still want peace. All signs point to the war being drawn out, and since human lives are on the line, we must repeat: we can only save lives through peace. We continue to oppose all steps leading to an escalation,” he added. Investments in

defence industry will play a large role in preparing this year’s NATO summit, Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. “Hungary is a step ahead in that regard, thanks to the investments strengthening our defence capacity but also the economy and our international position,” he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, FRANCE BOTH WANT PEACE IN UKRAINE

Hungary and France both want peace in Ukraine, but differ on the tactical steps that could make it happen, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Paris on Tuesday. As a neighbour of Ukraine, Hungary is confronted by the dramatic effects of the armed conflict on a daily basis, and its interests therefore lie in an immediate ceasefire and peace talks, Szijjártó said after meeting his French counterpart, Catherine Colonna, according to a ministry statement.

France’s position on this differs from that of Hungary the way almost every other European country’s position differs from Hungary’s, Szijjártó said, adding that there was an expectation that Ukraine may eventually be in a better position in the war to conduct negotiations. “We don’t believe in this; we think that it is time to end the suffering of the people,” he said.

Szijjártó said he and Colonna were in agreement on almost every other strategic non-European Union issue. One example, he said, was the matter of nuclear energy. He noted that both

Hungary and France had successfully pushed the EU to label nuclear energy as sustainable.

Szijjártó noted that the control system for the new reactor blocks of Hungary's Paks nuclear power plant is being supplied by a German-French consortium, and whereas Paris had approved the necessary permits for the system, Berlin had yet to do so. He said it was regrettable that certain German ministers were blocking the participation of Siemens Energy in the Paks upgrade project. He added that every country determined its energy mix in accordance with its national interests. "The Germans are now questioning this right and by ... blocking the permit, they are endangering our long-term energy security, which is unacceptable," Szijjártó said. He said plans were being devised with Siemens Energy's French partner, Framatome, to prevent delays in the project in case the German government sticks to its position.

Szijjártó also touched on security in Africa, saying Budapest and Paris were in agreement that the starting point for Europe's security was in Africa. "The protection of Europe, the fight against terrorism and the prevention of migration starts in Africa," he said. Hungary is prepared to undertake joint military missions with France as it already has in Mali, he added. He also noted France's participation in Hungary's space programme. Meanwhile, he said French companies were the fifth largest investor community in Hungary, adding that

bilateral trade turnover had reached a record high last year, exceeding 10 billion euros.

HIDVÉGHI: ORBÁN 'PROVEN RIGHT IN MIGRATION DEBATE'

"Time has proven the Hungarian prime minister right in the debate around migration," a MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz told MTI in Strasbourg on Wednesday. Balázs Hidvéghi said that in 2015 Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had been "the first European leader to realise and stress that the borders must be protected, by erecting a fence, if necessary, and he actually had such a fence built". "We can now see that more and more European leaders, even politicians in Brussels have started stressing the importance of border protection," Hidvéghi said. The MEP welcomed that the heads of state and government at the latest EU summit concluded that the community's external borders should be reinforced.

VÁRHELYI APOLOGISES FOR 'MISUNDERSTANDING OVER REMARKS' AT EP PLENARY

Hungary's EU Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi has expressed "sincere regrets" over a "misunderstanding" in connection with remarks he made during Tuesday's plenary session of the European Parliament. Hungary's opposition Democratic Coalition on Tuesday demanded that the

commissioner for enlargement and neighbourhood policy should resign without delay after he had been heard "calling deputies of the body idiots" through a microphone that was left turned on. In a statement, Várhelyi said on Wednesday that his remarks had been taken out of context. What he said, the commissioner insisted, "was related to a private conversation" held in Hungarian with his cabinet chief on a completely different topic. Várhelyi added he fully respected all institutions of the EU and their representatives, and thanked MEPs for Tuesday's plenary, which he called "an excellent opportunity to discuss the extremely important geopolitical issues of the Western Balkans". He said he was looking forward to further European Parliamentary debates "in full respect of my inter-institutional obligations and the principle of straightforward cooperation".

EP CALLS FOR RATIFICATION OF ISTANBUL CONVENTION

Members of the European Parliament on Wednesday adopted a position calling for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention against violence against women. In its position, the EP noted that the community could ratify the convention without a unanimous decision by the European Council. It said the convention, initiated by the Council of Europe, is key in fighting gender-based and domestic

violence. In its position, the EP called on Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia to ratify the convention without further delay. The CoE adopted the convention in 2011. Hungary signed the convention three years later, but has not ratified it yet.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MINISTER ADDRESSES GERMAN-HUNGARIAN INDUSTRY CHAMBER EVENT

The Hungarian government has launched several programmes to counter the negative effects of global challenges on the economy which could also benefit German-owned companies in Hungary, the economic development minister said at an event organised by the German-Hungarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DUIHK) on Wednesday. Márton Nagy noted that the government had launched the 700 billion forint (EUR 1.84bn) Baross Gábor Reindustrialisation Credit Programme, which gives businesses access to cheap investment and working capital loans. He augured tightening competition for foreign direct investment and said the government needed to maintain existing economic support programmes, while coming up with new ones, too. The government is drafting a scheme to boost investment activity with the purchase of privately-owned companies, the recapitalisation of existing capacities and the establishment of new

businesses, Nagy said. The details of the scheme, dubbed Baross Gábor Capital Programme, will be revealed “within a few weeks”, he added. The minister noted that Hungary had attracted 10 billion euros worth of FDI last year, “even in the face of all kinds of difficulty”.

Nagy said analysts expected Germany to avoid a recession, adding that even if the German economy stagnated this year, that translated as growth of 2% for Hungary. He said the government was consulting on a regular basis with industry insiders on what they needed to advance further and had held talks with representatives of pharmaceutical companies already, to be followed by meetings with representatives from the insurance, automotive and shared services sectors.

MUNICIPALITIES SEEK TO OBTAIN EU RECOVERY FUND'S LOAN COMPONENT

The Association of Hungarian Municipalities (MÖSZ) is proposing that the government should allocate “a substantial part” of the European Union’s recovery fund’s loan component to local governments for supporting energy saving investments, the mayor of Budapest said after MÖSZ’s board meeting on Wednesday. At a press conference, Gergely Karácsony, a co-leader of MÖSZ, welcomed the government’s plan to spend the loan in full on developing

and transforming Hungary’s energy system.

“The government must use the funds by 2026 and local governments can be an excellent partner if the government wants to prepare Hungary for a period of rising energy prices and transform its energy system,” Karácsony said. He said local governments had already faced serious financial problems because of the coronavirus pandemic, changes in the financing of the municipalities and the energy crisis. “Without receiving funds to be spent on more energy efficient public services or on renewable energy sources, local governments would most certainly go bankrupt”.

György Gémesi, the president of MÖSZ, said Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, will pay a visit to Hungary in early March and MÖSZ is organising a meeting for her with 25-30 mayors to discuss the use of EU cohesion funds.

COURT ORDERS SUSPECTS TO BE HELD IN CUSTODY OVER VIOLENT ATTACKS IN BUDAPEST

A Budapest court has ordered the detention of three suspects, Hungarian, Italian and German nationals charged with carrying out organised armed attacks against alleged participants of a far-right commemoration marking the anniversary of the Nazi breakout of the Castle District during the siege of Budapest on Feb. 11, 1945. A

fourth suspect, a German woman, has been instructed to keep in touch with the police via email, the Public Prosecutor's Office said on Wednesday. The prosecutor is appealing the latter ruling and seeking her custody, citing the risk that she may flee or hinder the gathering of evidence, the statement said.

The police are investigating assault and other crimes committed as a group, the statement said. Evidence gathered so far suggests that the perpetrators attacked people unknown to them, whom they picked because they were wearing clothing indicating far-right views, the statement said. Police have said that 7-8 people carried out attacks using telescopic stun batons and knuckle dusters over a number of days in Budapest. Some attacked a group of Polish tourists last Thursday, two of whom sustained grave injuries, the statement said. A man was assaulted on Friday on the outskirts of Budapest. A couple was beaten in downtown Pest and another, a German couple, in the Castle District, police have said.

MORE THAN 8,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY

Fully 4,535 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 3,788 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 111 people, ORFK said on Wednesday. Fully 36 people, 5 children among them, arrived by train in Budapest.

830 NEW INFECTIONS, 31 DEATHS REGISTERED LAST WEEK

Fully 830 new Covid-19 infections were confirmed last week, while 31 fatalities were registered in connection with the virus, the Coronavirus Press Centre said on Wednesday. The number of active infections stands at 3,644. Currently, 325 coronavirus patients are being treated in hospital, 6 intubated on a ventilator. Altogether 6,421,732 people have been vaccinated against the

coronavirus, with 6,208,908 having received a second jab, 3,904,788 a third, and 423,608 a fourth. The number of registered infections since the start of the pandemic has reached 2,194,102 in Hungary, while there have been 48,738 deaths. Fully 2,141,720 people have made a recovery.

BUDAPEST ZOO DRAWS OVER 1M VISITORS IN 2022

The Budapest Zoo and Botanical Garden attracted 1,036,000 visitors last year, making it the most visited cultural institution in the country. The Budapest Zoo and Botanical Garden said it recently placed 15th in an unofficial ranking of Europe's top 126 zoos, a few points behind zoos in Basel, Rotterdam and Cologne, but ahead of zoos in Copenhagen, Dublin, Amsterdam, Hannover, Nuremberg, Hamburg and London. The zoo earlier upgraded its heating system, with European Union support, to tap the thermal water of the nearby Széchenyi Baths. Last year, its consumption of gas and electricity dropped in the double digits.