

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Judit Ruprecht

The end-of-winter Busó festival in Mohács, in southern Hungary

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Parliament holds special plenary session**

**Foreign Minister Szijjártó meets China's top diplomat Wang**

**EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels**

**Events related to the war in Ukraine**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: 2023 'DANGEROUS YEAR'

If 2022 was the hardest year since Hungary's change in political system, then 2023 will be its "most dangerous year", Viktor Orbán said in a speech assessing the nation over the past year.

In his speech held in the Várkert Bazaar in Budapest, the prime minister noted the dangers of migration, "which has gradually stabilised", adding that "the war and inflation" were persistent threats. Orbán said European life was undergoing "massive change", bringing about new intellectual, political, economic and military tasks. Instead of "returning to the right path" following the coronavirus pandemic, the world "entered years of war". "The world is clearly heading towards the Wild West," he said "We've been living our lives under constant pressure" for the past three years, he said, adding that this "could easily be prolonged by four or possibly even five years". "When the West entered the war" with its sanctions everything had to be reappraised, and the government spent the months after the April general election precisely doing this, he said. Orbán said there was no reason to "give up" or abandon the goals set by the government but the means by which these goals can be attained must be changed. He promised to stick to his government's family policies, the country's labour-based economy, and to maintain price caps on household utility bills.

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## **GOVT KEEPING STRATEGIC SECTORS IN HUNGARIAN OWNERSHIP**

The government is keeping strategic sectors under Hungarian ownership such as the banking sector, the energy sector and the media industry in Hungarian hands, the prime minister said in his keynote speech, adding that telecommunications "will be made Hungarian again". The government is also keeping its promise to rural Hungary by launching unprecedented development projects. "We will allocate an amount of funding not seen by rural Hungary even during the Austro-Hungarian Empire," he added. The government will develop a manufacturing agriculture sector and revive the food industry "which was ruined by privatisations". "The food industry will have national champions that will be able to hold their own on the global market as well," he said, adding that Hungary will build power plants and pipeline networks, "even if Brussels refuses to play a role in this". The government, he said, will introduce more family support measures each year, such as the personal income tax exemption for mothers below the age of 30.

## **ORBÁN: HUNGARY'S CHOICE IS TO STAY OUT OF WAR**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in his keynote speech, said migration had "gradually stabilised" but "the war and inflation" were persistent threats.

Regarding the threat of war, Orbán said that if it were up to Hungarians they would "simply end it, but we don't have the weight to do it..." "If we want to protect Hungary and ensure a peaceful life, we have a single choice: stay out of the Russia-Ukraine war." "We, of course, can, because Hungary is an independent, free and sovereign state, and we don't recognise anyone above us other than God," he said. Orbán said Russia had attacked Ukraine, which meant that Hungary had to take in Ukrainian refugees. "And we did the right thing by supporting them through the largest humanitarian aid operation in our country's history," he added. But the Ukraine war is not a war between "the forces of good and evil, but rather those of two Slavic countries, limited in time, and for the time being, in space", Orbán said. "This is their war and not ours," he said. Hungary recognises Ukraine's right to defend itself and fight off an attack, Orbán said, adding at the same time that it would not be right, even from a moral standpoint, to put the interests of Ukraine before those of Hungary.

He accused the Hungarian left wing of being pro-war, insisting they wanted to send weapons to Ukraine and would be willing to assume the financial burdens of the conflict and cut ties with Russia. "But that's not what we're doing," he said. Orbán also said humanitarian support for Ukraine did not entail cutting ties with Russia, arguing that doing so would go against Hungary's national interests. So Hungary will not support

sanctions on oil or the nuclear industry, he said, adding that these would "bring Hungary to ruin". Hungary, he said, would maintain its economic ties with Russia and recommended that the West did the same since a ceasefire and peace talks depended on maintaining ties. Hungary, he added, would not support sanctions against people of the church.

A ceasefire and immediate peace talks are the only way to save lives, Orbán said. "Our pro-peace stance and the others' pro-war stance brings the differences to the surface and blurs the fact that we are in full agreement in terms of the strategic goals," Orbán said. "What we want is Russia not to pose a threat to Europe and we want there to be a broad and deep enough area between Russia and Hungary that is a sovereign Ukraine." The difference, Orbán said, was that the "pro-war side" believed this could be achieved by defeating Russia, while Hungary believed the key was an immediate ceasefire and peace talks. "There is another serious argument that supports our proposal: only a ceasefire can save lives," he added.

## **ORBÁN: NATO MEMBERSHIP 'VITAL TO HUNGARY'**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in his keynote speech that NATO membership was vital to Hungary, arguing that the country was located "too far on the eastern edge of the Western world" to abandon the

alliance. Following the example of Austria and Switzerland, he said, Hungary could “entertain the idea of neutrality”, but “history does not allow us this luxury”. He emphasised, at the same time, that NATO was a defence alliance rather than a “war alliance” or “war coalition”. NATO membership does not come with any obligations beyond joint defence, and the alliance’s member states cannot expect each other to attack a third country together for some shared military objective, the prime minister said. If some NATO members want to go to war beyond the territory of member states, then they must do so outside the framework of NATO, he said, adding that whoever believed that war could be controlled or managed step by step, no matter how powerful they are, they would overestimate their own strength and underestimate the risks of war. The prime minister said that no resident of Brussels had given their life to the war, “but Hungarians have”, noting that the war is taking place on Hungary’s doorstep.

Meanwhile, the prime minister referred to the suffering of the Hungarian national minority in western Ukraine, noting that Hungarian symbols had been desecrated in Mukachevo (Munkács), and Hungarians were being replaced as heads of schools, while “many are dying a heroic death on the frontline”. The Transcarpathian Hungarian minority “does not deserve this”, Orbán said, adding: “Show more respect for

Hungarians in Mukachevo, Kyiv, Brussels and Washington!”

Orbán warned that Europe had witnessed moments of being dragged into the war, and the question of whether the bloc was already in an indirect war with Russia was finely balanced. “If you deliver weapons, provide military satellite [imagery], train the soldiers of one side, finance the operations of an entire state apparatus, and impose sanctions on the other side, then ... you are at war; an indirect war.” The danger of being sucked into the war had become permanent, he said, starting with the delivery of helmets and then weapons. Now tanks and fighter jets are on the agenda, “and before you know it, it’ll be so-called peacekeeping troops.” He said a guarantee should have been made not to admit Ukraine to NATO, “but they did the opposite”. In 2008, he said, when Russia occupied 20% of the territory of Georgia, the conflict was localised thanks to the “brilliant negotiating skills” of then French President Nicolas Sarkozy, “and a ceasefire was reached”. When Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, under the leadership of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the West opted for negotiations instead of war, he said, adding that “brave and strong” German-French leadership had acted in time. “That’s how the war ended and the Minsk agreement came about,” he said. However, a year ago, the West raised the conflict to “a pan-European level” rather than limiting the conflict to one between two Slavic

states, as Hungary suggested it should do. This, Orbán said, was a powerful argument for strong nation states rather than a “Brussels superstate” since the decisions of member states led to peace, while decisions made “at the imperial centre” resulted in war. He said Hungary had gradually lost its pro-peace allies. Whereas Germany was still in the peace camp a year ago, now Leopard tanks were on their way to Ukraine and towards the Russian border. “It’s even possible that they have the old maps,” he said. The prime minister said that Germany had failed to withstand external pressure. “Now there are two of us left: Hungary and the Vatican,” he said.

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### **ORBÁN: HUNGARY MUST BE READY FOR ‘MORE THREATS, BLACKMAIL’**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán predicted in his speech that the tone towards Hungary would become “more and more harsh” as the war in Ukraine became “ever more savage”. He said Hungary must be prepared for an intensification of “provocations, insults, threats and blackmail”. He said he could not promise that it would be easy, “but we will stand our ground”. “We are long past the point of diplomatic pressure that respects sovereignty,” he said. Referring to US President Joe Biden, he said the president had sent an ambassador to Budapest with the aim of forcing Hungarians into the war camp at all costs, and to pressure them into

declaring their intent to join the war. He said "our Republican friends" were preparing to make a comeback in the 2024 US presidential election, while public opinion in Europe would start shifting more and more towards peace and "more sobriety", and, if necessary, would elect new governments. Orbán said peace would only be established if the US and Russia held talks. Hungary's government, he said, believed that more fighting would not bring about victory but result in the deaths of further hundreds of thousands, expand the conflict, drag countries into open war and threaten the possibility of a world war. "Let us Hungarians stay on the side of peace," he said.

Meanwhile, Orbán accused the European Union of saddling Hungary with the "disease" of inflation on the back of higher energy prices owing to its sanctions against Russia. The prime minister insisted that sanctions had deprived Hungarians of 4,000 billion forints (EUR 10.4bn) last year as Hungarian companies, the state and families had to spend that amount on energy instead of wage increases, tax reductions, or family support which "families could have spent on home purchases or their children". "Brussels", he added, was foisting "new sanctions" on Hungary instead of extending help. He said the "Brussels bureaucracy" had deprived Hungary and Poland of the recovery monies they were entitled to. Hungary did not receive money taken out as a joint loan by member states "and our share of which we will have to pay back", he added. Orbán said it was

important for Hungarians not to think that inflation was unslayable. Also, he said that thanks to "two dozen or so measures" to protect companies and families, the government is providing energy subsidies which helped the average household to save 181,000 forints each month. "This is unique in Europe," he added. Orbán vowed to keep price caps in place until inflation is set on a downward path, in the face of a left-wing demand to withdraw the price cap on basic foodstuffs. Also, the cap on interest on loans "which protects 350,000 families against spikes in interest rates" will be maintained, he added. From May 1, cheap national bus and train passes will be offered, he said.

Orbán said 2022 "could have broken the backbone of the Hungarian economy", yet employment and foreign currency reserves were at an all-time high "and the forint has also stabilised". Despite the high inflation rate, Hungary saw record employment, record exports and record investments in 2022, he said, vowing to bring inflation down into the single digits by the end of the year.

### **ORBÁN: NO FORGIVENESS FOR PAEDOPHILIA**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in his speech there could be "no forgiveness" for paedophilia, adding that children were "sacred and inviolable". Parents have a responsibility to protect children at all costs, he said. "We're not interested in hearing how Brussels tries to excuse and explain the inexplicable."

"This is Hungary, and Europe's strictest child protection regime should be in force here," he added. The laws are in place, and any that are missing will be passed, he said. This matter, he said, would require the help of parents, grandparents, teachers and educators "because gender propaganda isn't just some good-natured silliness, some rainbow spiel, but the biggest threat to our children." "We're counting on every good-willed Hungarian to be able to carry out this task together once and for all in 2023," he added.

### **ORBÁN: HUNGARIAN OPPOSITION 'MISCALCULATED'**

Hungary's left wing must come to realise they will not succeed in winning an election on the back of "millions of dollars" donated by "influential patrons", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in his keynote speech. The entire left wing had united against the governing parties, and "Brussels" had attempted to deprive the state of financing. Referring to financier George Soros, he said that "Uncle Gyuri" had pumped 4 billion forints worth of US dollars from America "so their comrades would have something to shoot us with". The prime minister said the opposition parties had grossly miscalculated, and they "will pay the price", adding that it was not by accident or a matter of luck that his government had won successive election victories with a two-thirds majority.

## **ORBÁN HAILS TÜRKIYE EARTHQUAKE RESCUERS**

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán greeted the Hungarian “heroes” of the search and rescue efforts following last week’s devastating earthquake in Türkiye. “It is in times of trouble that it becomes clear who can be counted on, and we Hungarians can be counted on,” Orbán said in his keynote speech held at the Várkert Bazaar. A total of 167 Hungarian staff and volunteers took part in the search and rescue efforts after the earthquake in Syria and Türkiye which claimed at least 44,000 lives, Orbán said. Risking their lives, the Hungarian teams rescued 35 people from the rubble, he added.

## **OPPOSITION PARTIES ON ORBÁN’S KEYNOTE SPEECH: PM FAILED TO ADDRESS COUNTRY’S ‘REAL PROBLEMS’**

Hungarian opposition parties on Saturday reacted to a keynote speech by Viktor Orbán, saying the prime minister had failed to address Hungary’s “real problems”. Commenting on Orbán’s speech assessing the state of the nation over the past year, the Democratic Coalition said in a statement that Orbán had “made a desperate attempt” to explain away “his government’s failings” over the past 12 years. The leftist party said Orbán had become isolated in Europe

and had lost Hungary’s EU funding as well as his European allies.

The right-wing Jobbik party’s leader Márton Gyöngyösi said Orbán was “a danger to Hungary”, and called the prime minister “Putin’s last ally in Europe” who wanted “Hungary out of the European Union”. “Orbán preaches peace, but he’s at war with his European allies...” he said. Under Orbán’s watch, Hungarians were witnessing the highest food-price inflation in Europe, he said, and he accused the prime minister of waging “a war against teachers” and “cheating nurses” out of a promised pay increase.

LMP lawmaker Máté Kanász-Nagy said in a video on Facebook that Orbán in his speech had shirked responsibility, while failing to explain how the government intended to handle the country’s “suffocating” energy dependence.

The radical Mi Hazánk party said Orbán in his speech should have unveiled a plan to create a national economy based on the food industry with a view to halting “brutal” inflation. He said the population was dwindling, Hungarians were getting poorer, and people found it hard to afford basic foods.

The liberal Momentum party’s leader Ferenc Gelencsár said in a statement that politics in Hungary was “a nightmare” of “lies played on a loop by blind populists”. He said price caps were “not working” and that Orbán’s work-based society did not provide the security of a livelihood. Furthermore, he said that under the

Fidesz government, “Russia is our friend and the EU is our enemy”.

Ágnes Kunhalmi, the co-leader of the Socialist Party, said in a statement that Orbán had shifted the blame for the country’s woes to factors such as the war and the EU from his own policymaking, and the prime minister “repeated his lie that the opposition is pro-war”. Also, Orbán’s charge that the opposition demanded the abolition of price caps was “untrue”, she said. The liberal Párbeszéd party said in statement that Orbán should have admitted in his speech that “Hungarian food inflation in 2022 was top of the European scoreboard” and that families were overwhelmed by utility bills they are unable to pay”. Orbán, it added, had also failed to take the blame for Hungary being the “shame of Europe” and admit that he was alone in supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin.

## **GULYÁS PRAISES JAPAN- HUNGARY TIES**

Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office, attended a reception marking the 63rd birthday of Japanese Emperor Naruhito in Budapest on Friday. Gulyás noted the warm hospitality during his visit to Japan last December, adding how he had been struck by “the many common values” that Hungary and Japan shared, such as “a deep commitment to country, loyalty and national pride”. He said Hungary and Japan respected international law and condemned



Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and hoped that a peaceful resolution to the conflict would be achieved as soon as possible. Speaking about economic ties, Gulyás called Japan's openness to investing in Hungary and promoting development "the engine of the two countries' longstanding and balanced partnership". He noted that Japan invested more than four billion dollars in Hungary in 2020.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: ALL CONDITIONS IN PLACE TO DEVELOP HUNGARIAN- AZERI ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

All conditions are in place for Hungarian and Azeri businesses to profit from the strategic partnership between the two countries, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said, addressing a Hungarian-Azeri business forum in Budapest. "We would like for more Hungarian and Azeri economic players to profit from the strategic partnership between the two countries," the foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying. "Especially now when the global economy has turned upside down for the second time in a very short period."

Szijjártó welcomed that there were no unresolved political issues between Hungary and Azerbaijan. Financial conditions are also in place, he said, noting that Hungary's Eximbank has opened a 140 million dollar credit line to finance cooperation between

Hungarian and Azeri businesses. As regards legal conditions, the minister said agreements between the two countries were secure thanks to an investment protection agreement that is in effect. Szijjártó noted Hungarian oil and gas company MOL's significant investments in Azerbaijan as well as drugmaker Richter's increased presence on the Azeri market. Azerbaijan will soon become a contributor to Hungary's energy security, as Hungary is set to start receiving Azeri natural gas this year, he said.

### **GOVT OFFICIAL CRITICISES EP'S WAR ANNIVERSARY 'RESOLUTION OF ESCALATION'**

A recent resolution adopted by the European Parliament marking one year since the start of the war in Ukraine is a "resolution of escalation", a state secretary of the cabinet office said in a video on Facebook. Csaba Dömötör said that "if it was up to the EP, it would drag us [Hungary] into the war", calling the resolution "serious". He noted the 18th point of the resolution which calls on EU member states "to supply Ukraine with Western fighter jets, helicopters and appropriate missile systems and to substantially increase munitions deliveries". Dömötör said Brussels also urges member states as well as the US, the UK and Canada "to swiftly deliver on their pledge to provide Ukraine with modern battle tanks". The resolution's section on

further economic sanctions "isn't any lighter", Dömötör said, noting that point 19 calls for "substantially broadening the scope of the sanctions, in particular those on the economy and the energy sector by prohibiting imports of Russian fossil fuels and uranium".

### **CORRUPTION TRIAL OF FORMER GOVT OFFICIAL, BAILIFFS' CHAMBER HEAD BEGINS**

Pál Völner, a former justice ministry state secretary, and György Schadl, the head of the Hungarian Chamber of Bailiffs, appeared in court on Friday to answer charges of corruption. Prosecutors allege that Schadl regularly bribed Völner until July 2021 and used his influence to secure the appointment of bailiffs of his choosing in exchange for kickbacks. Charges of corruption, property crimes and money laundering have been filed against a total of 22 people in the case.

According to the indictment, Schadl paid Völner a total of at least 83 million forints (EUR 217,000) in bribes between May 2018 and July 2021, who then exercised his influence as state secretary and deputy minister in Schadl's interest. Both defendants deny the charges. At Friday's preliminary hearing at the Budapest Municipal Court, prosecutor Gábor Boros said Völner, in exchange for the bribes, had moved to appoint bailiffs pushed by

Schadl and obtain state support for one of Schadl's companies. He said Schadl had obtained more than 924 million forints in kickbacks from the bailiffs he helped get appointed.

The prosecution has proposed that Völner receive an eight-year prison term and a 25 million forint fine, while it is seeking a ten-year prison sentence and a 200 million fine for Schadl. The trial is set to continue on Tuesday and Thursday next week.

### **OFFICIAL: MORAL RECOGNITION OF DIASPORA COMMUNITY IMPORTANT TO GOVT**

Árpád János Potápi, the state secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities abroad, spoke of the importance of the government's moral recognition of Hungarian diasporas at a meeting with Hungarians living in Australia, meeting representatives of the local Hungarian community on Australia's Gold Coast in the company of Zsolt Csenger-Zalán, Hungary's ambassador to Australia, as part of the ongoing Australian Hungarian Cultural Convention there. Contact with diaspora Hungarians has been elevated to the level it deserves to be at, Potápi told MTI. The topic itself had been taboo prior to the democratic transition, and not much changed afterwards, either, until the current government declared that diaspora Hungarians formed an important part of the nation, he said. The Hungarian

diaspora numbers around 2.5 million, about the same as the number of ethnic Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin, Potápi added.

### **DK SENDS BLANKETS, SLEEPING BAGS TO TÜRKIYE, SYRIA QUAKE SURVIVORS**

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has donated blankets and sleeping bags to the survivors of last week's earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. The relief supplies were purchased from the party community's donations, DK lawmakers said. Because the areas affected by the earthquake are still in need of aid, DK decided to open an account for donations from the party's members and base which it could use to contribute to the international aid efforts, Zolt Gréczy said. The supplies will be delivered to the crisis zones via the Turkish embassy in Budapest.

### **MI HAZÁNK APPEALS TO UNIONS TO COOPERATE**

The radical Mi Hazánk opposition party has appealed to trade unions to unite and cooperate with the party, insisting that the sole aim of global capitalism was to maximize profit at the expense of people's well-being. The forces of global capitalism harbour greater powers than national governments and only allow workers some rights out of self-interest, János Lantos, a party lawmaker, told an online press briefing, adding that the

Fidesz government had shown itself to be fully committed to the forces of global capitalism in the past 13 years. He also accused other Hungarian opposition forces of being beholden to global capitalists.

### **HUNGARY'S FILM INDUSTRY IN SPOTLIGHT IN VARIETY'S BERLINALE ISSUE**

Hungary's film industry is given special attention in entertainment magazine Variety's Berlinale issue. In an article titled "Hungary's Big Relaunch", Variety notes that Csaba Káel, head of the National Film Institute (NFI), is attending this year's the Berlinale international film festival, which will feature, among others, a production about Count András Hadik de Futak, Field Marshal of the Imperial Army in the 18th century.

### **NATIONAL, BUDAPEST HEAT RECORDS BROKEN OVER WEEKEND**

Both the national and Budapest heat records were broken on Saturday, the National Meteorological Service said, quoting unofficial preliminary data. The previous record of 18.2°C held by Pécs, in southern Hungary, on this day in 1955 was smashed in the area around Sopron, in the west, with 19.8°C recorded on Saturday. Újpest in the capital recorded 15.1°C in 2019, and today 17°C was recorded at several weather stations in Budapest.