

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Balogh Zoltán

Arts and Antique art fair in the Bálna events centre

UPCOMING EVENTS

President Novák to pay official visit to Prague

Stats office releases data on hotel occupancy for Jan 2023, 2nd reading of data on foreign trade for Dec 2022

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: GOVT KEEPING HUNGARY OUT OF WAR

Hungary is "being dragged into war", but its leadership is strong enough to keep the country out of the conflict, Viktor Orbán has told the Swiss daily Weltwoche.

Hungary was hit hard by the sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union, the prime minister said in the interview. The sanctions have driven up the price of oil and gas, and the cost of supplying the growing energy needs of Hungary's industry has risen from 7 billion euros in 2021 to 17 billion in 2022, he said. "We are under constant pressure. They want to drag us into the war by every possible means. So far, we have managed to resist ... Hungary's political leadership is strong enough to keep our homeland out of the war," he said. "The decisions made in Brussels [regarding Ukraine] mirror American interests more often than European ones," Orbán said. This war "cannot be won", he added. "Ukraine is facing a nuclear power with 140 million inhabitants. Russia is facing the entire NATO ... this is a stalemate, which could easily devolve into world war." Orbán cited President Vladimir Putin as saying at their last meeting before the war started that "he had no problem with Hungary's NATO membership, only with that of Ukraine and Georgia..."

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ORBÁN: PUTIN WARY OF NATO IN BACKYARD

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told the Swiss daily Weltwoche that President Vladimir Putin had told him that his concern was with the American missile bases in Poland and Romania, and a possible NATO expansion in Ukraine and Georgia to station weapons there. "The Americans also withdrew from important disarmament agreements," Orbán said. "I understand what Putin said. I do not accept what he did," he added.

Orbán said European political norms did not work in Russia, and Europe had to find a way to live together with a "large, dangerous power in our neighbourhood." On the possibility of Russia losing the war, Orbán said: "Russia is a nuclear power. It would be a geopolitical shock, a global, potentially disastrous earthquake, much worse than the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. The fact that the West takes that scenario so lightly shows a frightening blindness towards the risks inherent in our policies," he said.

Meanwhile, Orbán said that Europe should be able to defend itself. "The solution would be a European NATO," he said. While the West is lacking the will to broker peace, China, India, the Arab countries, Turkey and Brazil want just that, Orbán said. "The West has lost its ability to unite the world behind a cause."

Hungary is "showing an alternative should our friends and allies decide to give up their pro-war stance," he said.

On US politics, Orbán insisted the war could have been avoided had former President Donald Trump -- "a hope for peace ... who could probably broker peace within weeks" -- remained in power. The Democrat leadership does not recognise Hungary as "a successful country and the protector of the defences on the edge of the continent. So we are looking forward to our Republican friends gaining power again." Orbán said the "global realignment preached by the apostles of the Davos World Economic Forum" was very dangerous for Hungary, "an export-oriented country with important cultural and economic ties with the East."

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS FOR 'REALISTIC' APPROACH TO ENERGY SUPPLY ISSUES

The international community should approach energy supply issues realistically rather than through political or ideological considerations, to have a better chance of finding solutions to the challenges in the sector, the foreign minister said in Zagreb. Péter Szijjártó told a meeting of the Partnership for Transatlantic Energy and Climate Cooperation that energy security faced major challenges because of the war in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed in response to the conflict, and due to a tendency to make the issue increasingly a subject of political and ideological considerations. Solutions would be easier to find with a more realistic

approach, he said. "Ideologies do not heat houses or flats, and dreams do not create energy resources," he added. Political and ideological debates have already cost European supply lines "tens of billions of cubic meters" of natural gas, he said. "Hungary does not want to sacrifice nuclear energy and other resources to those artificial debates," he said.

Environmental protection goals are faced with the same problems, he insisted. "The debate on energy should return to normality and common sense," he said. To do that, national competencies should be respected more, he said. Each country has the right to set up its own energy mix. Energy supply security is also an issue of sovereignty, he added. Physical characteristics of the region are also key, as energy security hinges on safe resources and transport lines, he said. "If any of those are missing, then we don't have a realistic solution, and ideology cannot override that," he added. Energy diversification is also a key point, Szijjártó said. While other countries see diversification as "merely changing the geographical direction of energy dependence", Hungary does not want to give up energy resources but wants to acquire new routes, he said.

Green goals should also be discussed with common sense, and environmental protection should go "hand in hand with economic development", he said. Environmental goals cannot be reached without nuclear energy, which is key to long-term energy security, competitiveness and to the

green transition, he said. Nuclear energy is safe, cheap, sustainable and reliable, and Hungary will continue to fight against its "discrimination", he said. "We reject all measures curbing nuclear cooperation -- with Russia for example. That would put global nuclear security and energy supply at risk," he said. Szijjártó insisted that movements opposing nuclear energy were "well-funded and well organised, and we will have to prepare for further attacks, mostly on an ideological basis, because none of them are based on physical or realistic arguments," he said. European energy security can be guaranteed only if it is considered a "physical issue" and will not be sacrificed to political and ideological debates, he said.

FIDESZ MEP: SANCTIONS HURTING EUROPE MORE THAN RUSSIA

The sanctions imposed on Russia are "a slow-acting poison that seems to kill the one administering it before their intended target", Enikő Győri, an MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz, said on Thursday. A year after the sanctions on Russia were imposed, it is clear that that they have failed to bring about the end of the war in Ukraine, and Europe "is paying a high price for them", Győri said in a statement after a meeting of the European Parliament's international trade committee (INTA). The European Commission had expected the Russian economy to contract by 15% as a result of the sanctions, yet the slowdown is just over 2%, Győri said. She cited the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) as projecting a slight growth for the Russian economy in 2023. More than a hundred countries accounting for 40% of global GDP have not joined the oil embargo against Russia, she said, noting that Russia was exporting its oil to Asia. Meanwhile, the United States is making substantial profits from selling its liquefied natural gas, which could put Europe at a competitive disadvantage, she said.

In her address to the committee, Győri called for a clear and detailed impact study on the effect of the sanctions on European inflation, energy price increases and the burden they place on families and businesses. Győri expressed disappointment that the EC was not publishing such data. "If we do not know the consequences of the policy we have been pursuing so far, how could we keep going down this dangerous path?" she said.

NOVÁK TO DECORATE OUTGOING CZECH PRESIDENT

President Katalin Novák is set to decorate outgoing Czech President Miloš Zeman during an official visit to Prague on Friday, the president's office said. Novák will be received with military honours in Prague by Zeman, Sándor Palace said in a statement. Zeman will receive the Order of Merit of Hungary, Grand Cross with Chain "as an expression of the Hungarian nation's esteem", the statement said. Novák is also scheduled to meet president-elect Petr Pavel.

JUSTICE MIN: FAMILY SUPPORT INCLUDES HELP FOR SINGLE PARENTS

The government's support programmes for families also cover single parents, the justice minister told a conference on the subject on Thursday. Judit Varga said that assisting families was "something like a maternal instinct" for the government, which was "constantly fine-tuning" the system. The minister noted that the government plans to submit a bill tightening up the child protection law to parliament during its spring session. Children are "sacred and inviolable" in Hungary, she added. The minister said Hungary spent 6.2% of GDP on family support in 2021, which she called a world record, adding that many countries had showed an interest in the Hungarian system. The government has made the child support more client-friendly and single parents would be helped "in every possible way."

OFFICIAL: MEDICAL CHAMBER WILL 'NOT CLOSE DOWN'

The Hungarian Medical Chamber (MOK) will "not wind down; it can carry out its activities under the new regulations," State Secretary Péter Takács told public television. Takács said parliament "has only lifted mandatory chamber membership", one of three criteria for doctors to practice medicine. He said parliament's move was justified because the

chamber had "started acting as a political player rather than a public body". The chamber had put general practitioners "under pressure" and it could have "undermined the on-call system and thus directly jeopardise patient services", he insisted. "The government did not think it was right and had to act," he added.

Concerning the transfer of code of ethics procedures from the chamber to the Medical Research Council, the official said such procedures were "more than a friendly reprimand", which could lead to banning a doctor from practising. He said the council was "a body with long traditions", which would now be tasked with setting up a medical ethics committee and creating a new code of ethics.

OFFICIAL WARNS OF RISK OF UKRAINE WAR WIDENING

The fact that as many as 35 countries are sending weapons to the Ukrainian battlefield "indicates that we can no longer talk about a local conflict", a state secretary of the cabinet office said. In a video posted on Facebook, Csaba Dömötör said: "It is no exaggeration to say that this road leads to a world war." He said 17 countries had offered to send tanks and not only European countries were sending weapons, which showed an escalation. Australia, Sudan, Pakistan and the United States are also sending arms, he said, adding that the US were providing 2 billion dollars-worth of weapons.

Dömötör noted that Germany's Ukraine war policy had started with 5,000 combat helmets, while today they are sending not only anti-tank weapons and rockets but also Leopard tanks. Sweden and Spain are also sending such tanks, he added. And now the debate is about whether fighter jets should be provided, Dömötör said. "We are really just a hair from sending European soldiers being on the agenda," he added.

Although arms shipments are decided at the member state level, he said, the Brussels institutions are "on the same war track". Both the president of the Commission and the head of the Council would send more weapons, which has been confirmed by the European Parliament, Dömötör said. Finally, he dismissed the arguments that if we send more weapons, the war will end sooner. "This is what they said in 1914. We should stop now," Dömötör said in the video.

PÁRBESZÉD TURNS TO EC OVER BATTERY PLANT IN E HUNGARY

The opposition Párbeszéd party has lodged a complaint with the European Commission over the planned construction of a battery plant in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, saying that the plant was approved without adequate environmental impact studies. Benedek Jávor, the party's advisor on European Union affairs, told a press conference that the environmental impact and potential

risks were not assessed adequately, and a long-term impact study was missing completely. The plan was green-lighted without consideration of its impact on underground water reserves or the connected ecosystems, Jávor said. The water reserves around Debrecen are already overused, and would warrant a review of already existing permits, he said. Approving access for a plant with a daily demand of at least 20,000-25,000 cubic metres of water runs afoul of the European Union's Water Framework Directive, he said. The plant will also impact protected areas by further depleting underground water reserves, he said.

DK SUBMITS COUNTER- PROPOSAL TO FIDESZ'S 'PRO-PEACE' DRAFT RESOLUTION

The opposition Democratic Coalition (DK) has submitted to parliament a draft resolution in response to the declaration submitted by the ruling parties earlier this week. Criticising the draft resolution submitted by Fidesz and the Christian Democrats, DK deputy group leader Gergely Arató told an online press conference that his party's proposal focused on the interests of the Hungarian people "and what a responsible government should do in the current situation". Detailing the proposal, Arató said the VAT on basic foodstuffs and tax burdens on fuel should be cut to reduce inflation. He called for an end to "the utility bill disaster", urging instead a reduction of network access fees and

support for renewable energy along with energy efficiency upgrades. Also, the gas and electricity volumes households receive at regulated prices should be doubled, he added.

The construction of battery plants should be halted, Arató said, calling for legal guarantees that no such new plants will be built without the necessary environmental impact studies and the consent of local communities. DK's draft resolution also urges Hungary to join the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and calls for "the restoration of the rule of law" as well as the unlocking of European Union funds "that have been suspended due to government corruption". Arató said Hungary should also reaffirm its commitment to its EU and NATO memberships.

Fidesz reacted by saying DK's announcement "means that they are pro-war".

"Today's announcement by [DK leader Ferenc] Gyurcsány's party -- if we understand correctly -- means they do not support parliament's approval of the pro-peace resolution," Fidesz said

in a statement. The party argued that because its draft resolution underlines Hungary's commitment to peace and calls for urgent peace talks, DK's opposition to it meant that "the dollar left ... remains pro-war and in favour of weapons deliveries and sanctions".

HUNGARY GDP GROWTH SLOWS TO 0.4% IN Q4, KSH CONFIRMS

Hungary's annual GDP growth slowed to 0.4% in the fourth quarter of 2022 from 4.0% in Q3, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) confirmed in a second reading of data on Thursday. Adjusted for seasonal and calendar year effects, growth was 0.8%. Quarter on quarter, adjusted GDP edged down 0.4%, falling for the second quarter in a row. For the full year, GDP growth reached 4.6%.

HUNGARY SURPLUS IN SERVICES AT EUR 2.2 BN IN Q4

Hungary had a 2.2 billion euro surplus in trade of services in the

fourth quarter of 2022, narrowing from 2.7 billion in the previous quarter, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. Exports of services increased by 17.9% to 7.6 billion euros during the period. Imports of services rose by 8.7% to 5.4 billion. The surplus in tourism services reached 611 million euros, falling from 984 million in Q3. Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 70% of Hungary's service exports and 63% of its service imports.

MORE THAN 8,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 4,220 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 3,955 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 67 people, ORFK said on Thursday.