

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Plácido Domingo in concert in Budapest

MTI/Zoltán Balogh

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

Stats office releases Jan retail figures

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: PEACE WOULD SAVE LIVES

Peace in Ukraine would save lives, that is why the Hungarian government urges a ceasefire and immediate peace talks, the minister of foreign affairs and trade told Croatian news channel N1 on Sunday.

Concerning Hungary's position, Péter Szijjártó referred to Ukraine's ethnic Hungarian community, whose members are fighting in the Ukrainian military. "German or Danish soldiers do not die in this war but Hungarians do," he said. The minister said he hoped the European and transatlantic communities would also adopt the Hungarian position. Hungary is "not part of the conflict" therefore "it is not up to the Hungarian government to say what should happen after a ceasefire," Szijjártó said, but added that "geographical integrity and sovereignty must be observed". "It is also clear who attacked whom, and Hungary condemns Russia for the war," he said.

Answering a question suggesting that ending the war was up to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Szijjártó said "there are clearly two parties in a war", adding he hoped "they will talk because both will want sustainable peace". Should the war escalate, it will not happen "thousands of kilometres away, but in the neighbouring regions ... Hungary does not want to participate in this war", he said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: EU, HUNGARY TALKS 'FRUSTRATING'

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said talks under way between Hungary and the EU on community funding were "frustrating". He said the EU's freezing the funds due to Hungary was "no problem in terms of the budget", but it was "a matter of principle". Funds to members from the EU budget are "not humanitarian donations" and refusing to make those payments for political reasons is "unacceptable", he insisted.

The conflict between Hungary and the EU "arises from the fact that Brussels does not like the way the government rules the country", he said, adding that the government "opposes federalism and supports national competencies". "We are a right-wing, patriotic and Christian government running fully against the mainstream and Brussels cannot swallow that," he said. Concerning Finland's and Sweden's NATO membership, Szijjártó said the Hungarian government supported their bids, adding he thought parliament would support a relevant proposal by the government now before the assembly. Asked about Hungary's support for the Bosnian Serb Republic, Szijjártó said Hungary had "very good" relations with Serbia, and considered stability in the Western Balkans crucial. Economic stability is a key component, that is why the Hungarian government supports small and medium-sized companies in the Bosnian republic, he added.

KÖVÉR: EU, NATO NOT TAKING STEPS TOWARDS PEACE

Neither the European Union nor NATO are taking steps towards peace in Ukraine, but rather increasing escalation, Speaker of Parliament László Kövér told commercial HírTV late on Friday. Concerning the criticisms levelled at Hungary's parliament over not having debated Sweden and Finland's NATO accession bids until now, Kövér said Hungary was a sovereign country whose parliament sets its agenda at its own discretion. Sweden and Finland will not be able to join the alliance until Türkiye gives its approval, the speaker said, adding that this was unlikely to happen until it holds elections later this year. Kövér said it could take until the summer NATO summit for both countries to be ratified by all member states. He said the reason why Hungary was sending parliamentary delegations to Sweden and Finland was because the ruling Fidesz and Christian Democrat parliamentary groups had expressed concern and did not consider the decision on the ratification to be an automatic one. At the same time, he added, it should be clarified that Hungary is a sovereign member of both NATO and the EU and had joined both organisations voluntarily. Hungary does not believe that its position within these alliances has changed over the last decades, he said. The politicians who are now asking for

Hungary's support have behaved in a way "that would have been considered harsh even coming from our enemies", Kövér said. It should be made clear that they have no right to interfere in Hungarian politics, Kövér said, adding that an alliance involves trust, "which was thoroughly undermined before the accession". He said support for Sweden and Finland's NATO accession was not a question of "good manners or sensitivity", insisting that the two countries had insulted Hungary for years and had caused damage to its national interests. They are now pressuring EU institutions not to give Hungary the funding it is entitled to, he added. Kövér said the Hungarian delegation will meet with the Swedish and Finnish parliamentary speakers, relevant committees and foreign ministers on Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively. The delegation will be headed by Fidesz lawmaker Csaba Hende and will include Zsolt Németh, the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee, and MEPs Enikő Győri and Ernő Schaller-Baross, he added. Kövér said the Swedish and Finnish armies were well-prepared and well-equipped and would strengthen NATO. He added, at the same time, that the 1,340km border NATO and Russia will share because of Finland increased the risk of a future military conflict between them. He said the 60 billion US dollars' worth of weapons EU and NATO member states had sent to Ukraine made them party to the conflict. Peace, he said, was ultimately dependent on Russia and

Ukraine. Neither the EU nor NATO are taking steps towards peace, but rather increasing escalation, the speaker said. Kövér urged a compromise that takes into consideration both Ukraine's territorial integrity and Russia's security expectations. Meanwhile, he said the planned amendment to Hungary's child protection law should also involve reviewing the regulation of media players that are not headquartered in Hungary but broadcast in the country.

FIDESZ MEP SLAMS EP PRESIDENT'S CALL FOR MORE EU ARMS SHIPMENTS TO UKRAINE

Balázs Hidvéghi, an MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz, on Sunday slammed European Parliament President Roberta Metsola's call for more EU weapons deliveries to Ukraine as "unacceptable", saying they would lead to a further escalation of the war. "We cannot allow the irresponsible remarks made by politicians in Brussels to drag Europe further into the armed conflict and push the world towards the outbreak of a world war," Hidvéghi told MTI. The EP president's call on member states to send more weapons will lead to an escalation of the war, more bloodshed and more casualties, Hidvéghi said. "It is not weapons, but an immediate ceasefire that is needed," he said. Hungary remains pro-peace, Hidvéghi said, adding that "we will not allow pro-war politicians to drag us into the

war." "We will therefore resist pressure from Brussels in order to protect the security of the Hungarian people," the MEP said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY ASTRONAUT CANDIDATES NARROWED DOWN TO FOUR

Hungary's shortlist of candidates to become the country's next astronaut and participate in a 30-day mission at the International Space Station in late 2024 or early 2025 has been narrowed down to four, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Saturday. A shortlist of eight candidates was selected out of more than 240 applicants, who were then tested at the Kecskemét airbase of the Hungarian Armed Forces, Szijjártó said on Facebook. It was on the basis of these tests that the expert body conducting the selection process narrowed down the list of candidates to four, the minister added. The Hungarian astronaut's mission will involve testing Hungarian space equipment on the ISS as well as conducting experiments for Hungarian research groups, Szijjártó said. The remaining four candidates will be subjected to further training and testing over the coming year, he added. Projections show the space industry as being one of the fastest-developing sectors of the 21st century, Szijjártó said. Hungary aims to play a part in this with the astronaut programme it has established as part of its space strategy, the minister said.

STATE SECY LAUNCHES HUNGARIAN AID CONSIGNMENT WORTH OVER HUF 100 M IN BEREHOVE

Zoltán Kovács, the state secretary for international communications, launched a consignment of humanitarian aid worth 100 million forints (EUR 260,000) and compiled by six Hungarian charities to help civilians in need in the regions affected directly by the war in Ukraine. At the ceremony in Transcarpathia, Kovács told a press conference that the aid contains power generators, durable foods, medicine and hygiene items. Hungary's Maltese, Catholic, Baptist and Reformed Charities, the Hungarian Interchurch Aid and the Hungarian Red Cross have been supplying aid to refugees and people in need since the outbreak of the war, Kovács said. Hungary has so far provided 123.3 billion forints worth of support including 13 billion forints worth of direct aid by the charities and assistance for infrastructure reconstruction and development, as well as fuel supplies.

OFFICIAL: UKRAINE WAR BENEFITS LARGE ENERGY COMPANIES

The war in Ukraine "is bad for everybody except large energy companies", a state secretary of the prime minister's cabinet office said in a video published on Facebook

on Sunday. Csaba Dömötör insisted that some companies were getting “stinking rich” through soaring energy prices, with special regard to “large, international energy companies”. Referring to public data from 2022, Dömötör said Austria’s OMV had profits after tax amounting to 5 billion euros. Shell posted a record 40 billion dollars, twice as much as before the war. British Petrol also broke records with 28 billion dollars, over twice as much as in 2021. France’s Total earned a record 20.5 billion dollars, while US Chevron had revenue of 35 billion dollars and Exxon 56 billion dollars, Dömötör said. “It appears that imposing sanctions and the resulting high prices is no bad business ... but not for us,” Dömötör said. He said “Hungary’s energy bill” had increased by 4,000 billion forints (EUR 10bn). “This must be paid by companies, families, and the Hungarian state; it is not right,” he said.

PÁRBESZÉD: ONLY RUSSIAN WITHDRAWAL CAN BRING ABOUT PEACE

Hungary’s opposition Párbeszéd party on Sunday said it will submit to parliament a draft resolution declaring that only a Russian withdrawal from Ukraine can bring about peace. Addressing an online press conference, Párbeszéd MP Tímea Szabó criticised a draft resolution submitted by the ruling parties this week to mark the anniversary of the start of the war

in Ukraine, saying it was missing “basic facts” such as “Russian President [Vladimir] Putin being the one to blame for the outbreak of the war” and that “the Russian army has committed crimes against humanity”. The draft resolution, she added, also failed to mention that the key to peace was a withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. Párbeszéd’s document, however, “makes it clear that the blame for the war lies with Putin and Russia” and “calls for an immediate withdrawal” by Russia, Szabó said. It also calls on international organisations to hold the perpetrators of war crimes to account before an international court, she said. The draft resolution also backs the sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union and calls on the government to continue supporting the sanctions packages. It says the sanctions are not to blame for Hungary’s “record 26% inflation rate”, arguing that average inflation in the EU is 10.5%.

The document underscores Hungary’s interest in weaning itself off Russian gas and calls on the government to do everything in its power to support refugees from Ukraine and the civil groups aiding them. It adds that as a committed member of the EU and NATO, Hungary should assist the peace efforts of international organisations, and calls on public media and “the government propaganda press” to “end their pro-Russia disinformation campaign”, Szabó said.

JOBBIK-CONSERVATIVES DEMANDS PAY RISE FOR TEACHERS

The opposition Jobbik-Conservatives party has demanded that teachers should be granted a 50% pay rise without delay, and slammed the government’s plans to introduce an evaluation system which the party thinks could result in reduced salaries. Koloman Brenner, the deputy group leader of the party, said on Facebook on Saturday the planned system had been completed without negotiations with the teachers themselves, and full introduction of the regime from next year on “could have financial ramifications”.

Jobbik-Conservatives consider teachers “responsible professionals rather than servants that could be dismissed at any time”, Brenner said, adding that under the new system “Fidesz delegates” supervising schools could “decide who should receive a higher or smaller salary”. Jobbik-Conservatives also proposes that an earlier system of school supervisors should be reintroduced “to support teachers’ work” rather than just exercise control over them.

SOCIALISTS CALL FOR OPPOSITION COOPERATION IN 2024 LOCAL ELECTIONS

The Socialist Party has called on Hungary’s opposition parties to cooperate in the 2024 local

elections. Ágnes Kunhalmi, the party's co-leader, told an online press conference on Saturday that the reason why the local and European parliamentary elections were being held on the same day next year was because ruling Fidesz wanted to focus its campaign "on Brussels, sovereignty and identity". "This is the trap the opposition must avoid by preparing for the elections in time" and by fielding joint candidates together with civil groups, Kunhalmi said. "We're forced to cooperate," she said, arguing that there were no changes to the election system that would justify the opposition parties fielding separate candidates. The opposition must choose the best candidates against Fidesz locally, both at the mayoral and local councillor level, she added.

She urged the opposition to select a single candidate for each locality either by agreeing on one or holding a primary.

NEARLY HUF 4 BN TO BE SPENT ON FLOOD DEFENCE IN NE HUNGARY

Flood defence dykes will be reinforced to a value of 3.9 billion forints (EUR 10.3m) on two tributaries of River Tisza, in northeast Hungary, with the help of Hungarian and European Union funding, the communications company for the project said on Friday. Dykes along the rivers Kraszna and Batar will be reinforced along a total length of 22 kms, also making the riverside suitable for cycling, the statement said. A lock and mobile

pumping station will be rebuilt on the Batar and the programme will also cover the acquisition of equipment required for maintenance and operation, it added. The development is necessary for flood defence on the Upper Tisza.

NEARLY 10,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 5,117 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 4,757 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 93 people, ORFK said on Sunday. Budapest received 71 people arriving by train, ORFK said.