

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

Folk craft artist Gabriella Kiss's 'Women of Kalotaszeg' presentation at the Pest Vigadó cultural centre

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: 'WE ARE CLOSER THAN EVER TO WORLD WAR'

The world is closer than ever to a local conflict becoming world war, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told public radio on Friday.

"Leaders of the western world are gripped by war fever, holding speeches calling for winning the war and making further sacrifices, and sending increasingly dangerous weapons to Ukraine," Orbán said. Rather than promoting peace unanimously, the world is divided: Turkic and Arab states, China and African countries want a ceasefire and peace talks, he said.

At the same time, Hungary is "basically the only" pro-peace European country besides the Vatican, he said. Pro-war countries are motivated as much by "business speculations, defence and economic policy considerations and calculations on post-war advantages" as by commitment to principles and faith, Orbán insisted.

Meanwhile, Hungary must have a strong military and promote peace at the same time, he said. Hungary needs a combat-ready army, and the government is working to increase the number of troops, their commitment to their homeland and vocation, their level of training, and their prestige, Orbán said. They must also be equipped with modern weapons, he said. "Being pro-peace doesn't mean we have to be defenceless," he said.

ORBÁN: WAR 'TOOL' FOR RESTRUCTURING POWER IN EUROPE

The war is also a tool for “restructuring power in Europe,” Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in a radio interview on Friday. While every country must prepare for what comes after the war, “a responsible leader cannot afford himself to publicly speculate on its outcome.” Leftist parties “are pro-war, and “as long as they are being financed from abroad”, they are expected to stay that way, he said. However, the parliamentary majority ensures a bigger weight to the “party of peace”, Orbán said.

At the same time, Orbán said new opportunities have opened to those that want to change traditional European power relations, formed around the Franco-German axis. In the past, the US did not directly interfere in shaping European politics but this has changed with the war in Ukraine and the US is now leading a “pro-war coalition” behind Ukraine, Orbán said. “The Americans stand behind heroically fighting Ukrainians, which does not detract from the value of Ukrainians’ heroism but the truth is that Ukraine can only continue fighting as long as the US says yes to it,” he said. “Once the US says no, a ceasefire will ensue,” he added.

Donald Trump, who plans to run for president again, wants a ceasefire, so the outcome of the 2024 US elections will have a direct influence on whether

the war continues or a ceasefire and peace talks take place, Orbán said. He also said that scrapping war-related sanctions would be the fastest way to curb inflation, and Hungary will continue to veto measures that would cause “the most immediate damage” to its economy. Should the European Union scrap the sanctions imposed on Russia tomorrow, inflation would halve instantly, then gradually return to 2-3%, Orbán said. The ten packages of sanctions so far meant “ten bloody [political] battles” when the government had to stand up for the country’s interests, Orbán said, praising Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó’s leadership in the matter. Thanks to government measures, inflation is expected to return to single digits by the end of the year, he said. Support for the steps protecting families, pensioners and SMEs is widespread, and they are generally expected to yield results, he said. Those results should be visible by the end of 2023 the latest, he said.

Orbán said the gap between Brussels and Hungary is insurmountable when it comes to gender affairs but “since we will not yield [to pressure], Brussels will have to”. Parents have every right to expect help from the government in protecting their children, and raising children should remain the responsibility of parents, Orbán said. Schools must not be allowed to promote a way of life that parents disagree with, he added. “Gender identity belongs in this latter category because the Hungarian approach

is that propaganda has no place in schools,” he said. If the standards of child protection loosen, the number of paedophile crimes will increase, he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY OBJECTS TO ‘SEVERING’ EU-CHINESE ECONOMIC TIES

Hungary is firmly against “severing” the European Union’s economic cooperation with China in a move to “override economic realities with political considerations”, and instead calls for shaping mutually advantageous relations, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said in Stockholm on Friday. Speaking after an informal meeting of EU trade ministers, Péter Szijjártó said Europe had become one of the losers of the past years’ economic trends, at a time when a “new era is about to take shape”.

Western manufacturers of electric cars, a key sector in world economy, have become dependent on eastern players, he said. Of the ten largest battery manufacturers in the world, 7 are Chinese and 3 South-Korean, he added. Meanwhile, the EU’s sanctions on Russia in response to the war in Ukraine have proven more harmful for the bloc’s economy than to Russia, he said. The US is using the situation to draw investments from the EU, he said. “Europe is not in great shape in this context, and now, some within and without the EU are trying to inspire us to yet another self-destructive

decision that I think would be a fatal error: to artificially sever economic ties between Europe and China," Szijjártó said.

Trade volume between the EU and China was at 856 billion euros last year, and the EU would "lose out" on halting trade, he said. Hungary's share of that volume was 1.4% last year, he noted. "Should someone decide to sever those economic ties, that would deal a shattering blow to a key European sector, car manufacturing," he said.

Hungary would be hit especially hard as it is an important meeting point of western car manufacturers and eastern battery makers, he said. "Overriding economic realities with dogmatic political considerations would be extremely harmful," he said.

EU-US cooperation was also discussed at the meeting, Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary has an interest in as close a cooperation as possible. US companies are the second largest investor group in the country, he said.

In connection with the Ukrainian deputy prime minister's attendance at the talks, Szijjártó noted that Hungary had launched the largest humanitarian operation of its history to aid Ukrainian refugees. It has also implemented an important investment in Fényeslitke, "at the border of the EU and Ukraine," he said. At the same time, Szijjártó said that Ukrainian grain "originally meant for needy regions in Africa and Asia" often end up on central European

markets, "causing disturbance that is hard to handle". "We think it is important that the EU takes steps to protect central European agricultural interests," he said. He also called on Ukraine to "stop penalising European companies that have breached no rules but are reluctant to withdraw from Russian markets, as they did with several Hungarian pharmaceutical companies". Hungary expects the EU to take steps on the issue, he added.

JUSTICE MIN: EFFECTIVE OPERATION OF HUNGARIAN COURTS ENSURED

Hungary has successfully improved universal access to justice in the country in the past few years, and the effective, modern operation of courts is ensured, Justice Minister Judit Varga said on Friday, ahead of the meeting of EU justice ministers in Brussels. The European Union's justice scoreboard also shows that Hungarian courts are among the most advanced in digitalisation, Varga said in a Facebook post. "We are in 4th place regarding the estimated duration of civil and economic lawsuits," she said.

Victim protection centres, important platforms for universal access to justice, are currently present in 14 counties and Budapest, and the government is working to extend the system nationwide by 2025, she added. The Hungarian system is in close cooperation with other government

offices, the police, NGOs and churches, she said. The number of victims reached through the centres continues to grow even as the number of criminal acts is falling, she said.

Noting that the meeting will also table the fight against anti-Semitism, Varga said Hungary's government had a zero tolerance policy against anti-Semitism. "We are committed to maintaining Hungary as a home to thriving Jewish communities and culture, and a safe home to everyone, regardless of religion. Hungary's EU presidency in the second half of 2024 will make the fight against anti-Semitism a priority," she said.

ORBÁN DISCUSSES SANCTIONS, MIGRATION WITH AUSTRIA FPÖ LEADER

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán discussed the war in Ukraine, related sanctions, inflation and illegal migration with Herbert Kickl, head of Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ), in Budapest on Thursday. Orbán and Kickl were in agreement about the risk of the escalation of the war and the need to call for an immediate ceasefire and peace talks at all possible forums, Bertalan Havasi said. They also were in agreement that as a result of sanctions imposed by Brussels prices have increased at an unprecedented rate in Europe and concluded that once peace is restored, sanctions could be lifted and prices would go down. Orbán and Kickl welcomed

cooperation between their countries in the fight against illegal migration. They said the European Commission must be called on to take effective measures for the protection of the EU's external borders and contribute to the costs of fences erected by member states.

PRESIDENT NOVÁK: CHRISTIAN POLITICS FEASIBLE FOR HUNGARY, FLORIDA

Taking a role in politics, the participation of young people in public life and Hungary's family policies were the focus of a lecture President Katalin Novák delivered at the Catholic Ave Maria University in Florida on Thursday local time. At the last stop of her US visit, Novák told students of the private university that pursuing politics on a Catholic principle was based on respect for each other. The Christian alternative in government can work not only in principle but also in practice, she said. Its implementation, however, requires the power of government because principles without the powers are insufficient, she added. Good principles and values, and a strong conviction are necessary but in order to put them into practice, a sufficient position in power is also necessary, she said. The Christian political alternative is feasible, she said and added that in Florida, too, one can experience that the principles also work in practice and they are attractive to the majority.

RÉTVÁRI CALLS FOR 'REAL, EFFECTIVE' BORDER PROTECTION MEASURES BY EU

Bence Rétvári, state secretary at the interior ministry, called for "real and effective" border protection measures to be taken by the European Union, in Brussels on Thursday where he attended a meeting of EU interior ministers. "Hungary protects Europe against a massive pressure posed by illegal migrants thus protecting the EU's external borders," he told Hungarian reporters after the meeting, adding that Brussels "should contribute funds to the 1.6 billion euros Hungary has so far spent on providing for the community's security".

In connection with the war in Ukraine, he underlined that an immediate ceasefire and brokering peace was of primary importance for Hungary. He noted that the SIS II second generation of the Schengen Information System had been launched two days ago. He called the system an important tool in more effectively combatting cross-border crime.

SZÁZADVÉG: HUNGARIANS CONDEMN PRO-WAR STATEMENTS

The majority of Hungarians condemn pro-war statements, the Századvég Institute said on Friday. Századvég

cited Prime Minister Viktor Orbán as saying after a meeting of European Union leaders in February that "Hungary belongs in the pro-peace camp". However, the government's pro-peace position has attracted some international criticism, in an attempt to exercise pressure, the statement added. Századvég said that a survey prepared by interviewing 1,000 Hungarians in March showed that 56% disagreed with EU Vice-President Vera Jourová who recently said "Hungary must be called out more often, particularly about its positions on Russia and the war".

Some 58% said they disagreed with US Ambassador David Pressman who reacted to Orbán's call for ceasefire by stating that there was neither a "peace camp" nor a "war camp", Századvég said. Seven out of 10 respondents in the survey opposed a recent call by EP President Roberta Metsola for EU countries to send more weapons to Ukraine and consider sending fighter jets, Századvég added.

The survey also assessed Hungarians' views on what consequences such statements could have on the progress of the war. The majority of respondents, between 54% and 74%, said the above statements could result in the escalation of the conflict rather than promoting peace talks. "Hungarians' pro-peace stand is unchanged and the majority reject proposals that carry the risk of making peace impossible," Századvég said.

LMP: GOVT ANNOUNCED 'PROGRAMME FOR HUNGARY'S ECONOMIC COLONISATION'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at a conference on Thursday was tantamount to a "programme of the economic colonisation of Hungary", opposition LMP said on Friday. In his speech at the year-opening event of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MKIK), Orbán said Hungary would build gas plants in the eastern part of the country, deputy group leader Máté Kanász-Nagy told a press conference. The plants will be fuelled with Russian gas, further curbing Hungary's energy independence, he added.

They will provide energy to the battery plants to be built in Debrecen and Nyíregyháza, Kanász-Nagy said. "We will use Russian gas to help Chinese plants to sell their products to German car manufacturers, which then take the profit out of the country," he said. Regarding the economic development minister's statement that Hungary should increase the number of jobholders by 500,000, Kanász-Nagy insisted the government would rely on economic migration to achieve that goal.

SOCIALISTS CALL FOR MAINTAINING PRICE CAPS, DEVELOPING KNOWLEDGE INDUSTRIES

The opposition Socialists call on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to review his economic policies and instead of developing battery manufacturing, to focus on knowledge-intensive industries, the deputy party leader said on Friday. Ágnes Kunhalmi told an online press conference on Facebook that the cause of high inflation in Hungary was not the war but Orbán's "bad economic policies".

She cited expensive Russian gas, the weak forint, the lack of an agreement with the European Union, a 4.1% extra retail tax and neglected compensation to flood damage victims among the reasons. She said it was a "lie" that price caps posed a huge burden on the economy and she proposed maintaining them until the government scrapped VAT on basic foods, or carried out significant wage and pension hikes.

She cited central bank governor György Matolcsy as saying that the mistakes made in the 2010s have caught up with Hungary. Instead of using battery production as a way to "jump on the bandwagon" in electric

car manufacturing, she called for focusing on knowledge-intensive industries, research and development.

TRADE GAP AT EUR 165 M IN JAN

Hungary had a 165 million euro trade deficit in January, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Hungary, an export-driven economy where trade surpluses are the norm, has had trade deficits every month for a year and a half. Exports rose by an annual 14.6% to 12 billion euros, while imports increased by 13.6% to 12.2 billion. Trade with other European Union member states accounted for 78% of Hungary's exports and 67% of its imports during the month.

MORE THAN 9,000 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 4,994 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 4,404 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 63 people, ORFK said on Friday. Budapest received 16 people, 9 children among them, who arrived by train.