

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Noémi Bruzák

President Novák meets Ukrainian refugee children in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU leaders begin two-day summit in Brussels

Finance ministry releases detailed budget report for Jan-Feb

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Hungary police, FBI hold joint presser on case traced to US

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ URGES QUICKER EU ENLARGEMENT

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Wednesday called for EU enlargement to be speeded up, saying that the integration of Western Balkan countries would strengthen the bloc and help in the handling of current issues.

Szijjártó met his Bosnia-Herzegovina counterpart, Elmedin Konaković, in Sarajevo, and noted at a joint press conference after the talks that the war in Ukraine presented the EU with serious challenges, the foreign ministry said in a statement. The situation has shown that the EU made a mistake when dragging its feet on enlargement in the past, he said. "Should the Western Balkans be part of the bloc, the dramatic impact of the current difficult situation could be handled far more easily," he said, adding that the accession of the Western Balkan states would also bolster the bloc against illegal migration. Szijjártó slammed member states which he said "support enlargement rhetorically but continue to block the process otherwise." He called on "anti-enlargement countries" to stop blocking the process "as this harms the EU and is a national security risk for Hungary", he said.

Stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a priority for Hungary, he said, calling on the EU to "take meaningful steps" to facilitate its integration.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY AIDING BOSNIA- HERZEGOVINA'S EU ACCESSION PROCESS

Hungary has already sent experts to Sarajevo to aid Bosnia-Herzegovina's European Union accession process, and has deployed 165 troops to the EU's peace keeping mission in the country, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó told a joint press conference with his Bosnia-Herzegovina counterpart, Elmedin Konaković, in Sarajevo. He rejected the EU employing "any sort of sanctions on democratically elected leaders in the region". "Those thinking we can solve a problem by sanctions have no idea of the situation here and are trying to conceal their ignorance with a sort of hubris." Meanwhile, trade between Hungary and Bosnia-Herzegovina jumped by a record 21% last year, to 600 million euros, Szijjártó said. Hungary has launched a mutually advantageous economic development scheme in the country, which allows local farmers to buy Hungarian agricultural machinery. Fully 805 companies have applied for the programme, contracting a total of 11.5 million euros in support, he said.

As regards migration, Szijjártó said its root causes were becoming more grievous. He said this meant migration pressure was expected to grow from already high numbers last year, when Hungarian authorities registered 265,000 illegal entry attempts. "Migration is dangerous and so it has

to be stopped, and we know that the stronger the cooperation with Western Balkan states, the more effectively can we stop waves of migration," he said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ REJECTS US STATE DEPARTMENT'S REPORT ON BOSNIA- HERZEGOVINA

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Wednesday said Hungary respected the re-election of Milorad Dodik, the Serbian member of Bosnia-Herzegovina's presidential troika. At the same time, he rejected the US State Department's latest report on Bosnia-Herzegovina, saying it was "outrageous that they should make statements about other countries' internal affairs and situation".

Szijjártó said that though Konaković was not in need of his support, he still wanted to voice his objection to the report. "I must say I'm shocked and each year I'm amazed that the US State Department has the audacity to label other countries and make such ex cathedra statements about the internal affairs and situation of other countries," Szijjártó said. "Who are they to do this? I have no knowledge of the foreign ministry of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and especially mine, writing reports about the human rights or other situations of other countries. Why? Because for one thing, it's not our job to do so, and also it's none of our business," he said. Szijjártó said the decision on who should govern Bosnia-Herzegovina and the question of whether the

public is satisfied with the state of their country should be left up to the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

He said Washington should also leave it up to Hungarians to decide what happens in Hungary. "We object to anyone questioning Hungarian democracy and the will expressed by the Hungarian people in democratic elections," he said. Meanwhile, he said cooperation between Hungary and Dodik was fair and based on mutual respect, adding that Bosnia-Herzegovina's territorial integrity was beyond dispute. Szijjártó said there was "no mutual respect in international politics today". Certain countries are very willing to interfere in the affairs of other countries, he said, adding that Hungary never questions the outcome of Bosnia-Herzegovina's elections.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY WON'T GIVE UP ENERGY SECURITY FOR POLITICAL REASONS

Hungary refuses to give up its energy security for any political reason, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said on Wednesday, adding that though the country was working hard to diversify its energy supplies, it had no intention of phasing out Russian energy imports. Speaking at a panel discussion with Milorad Dodik, the Serbian member of Bosnia-Herzegovina's presidential troika, at an energy forum in Trebinje, Péter Szijjártó said Hungary was directly impacted by the negative effects

of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Hungary is in a special situation given that it is a landlocked country and imports most of the energy it consumes, he said. "We view the question of energy as a part of physical reality," Szijjártó said. "And we would like it if the world applied a grounded approach to at least the issue of energy consumption," the minister said. This requires natural gas sources and pipelines, "otherwise we're fostering illusions", he added. Hungary applies a realistic approach to energy, he said, adding this meant realising that it was physically impossible to guarantee the security of the country's natural gas supply without Russian imports. "It's not impossible politically, but physically," he emphasised.

Hungary's government has made considerable efforts for the long-term diversification of the country's energy mix, but it takes time for these to be successful, Szijjártó said. Natural gas pipelines cannot be built overnight, the minister said, adding that it was possible that Hungary would no longer require Russian gas imports in five to eight years' time. "We refuse to give up our own energy security for any political reason," Szijjártó said. Diversification means involving as many sources as possible in the energy mix, not just swapping one dependence for another, he said, adding that Hungary would be counting on Russian energy along with other sources in the future,

too. Szijjártó said Russia's Gazprom had proven to be a reliable partner, and because that partnership was not subject to sanctions, there was no reason to phase out Russian energy. Meanwhile, he said the ten sanctions packages imposed on Russia by the European Union had failed to "bring Russia to its knees" and the war was "more brutal than ever".

DEUTSCH: RULING PARTIES REJECT EU'S 'AGGRESSIVE ATTACK' AGAINST CHILD PROTECTION LAW

Hungary's ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrat alliance "rejects the European Commission's aggressive, brutal attack against the country's child protection law," Fidesz MEP Tamás Deutsch said in a video statement on Wednesday, adding that the government would "protect" the contested legislation. Deutsch said that in a referendum last year "nearly 4 million parents and grandparents" had supported the legislation against "gender ideology" and "increasingly aggressive attacks by LGBTQ activists". The MEP said it was "Hungarian parents' inalienable right to make decisions concerning their children's sex education", and insisted that "children are sacred and inviolable". "We will protect Hungarian children ... we will defend the child protection law," he said. Deutsch called it "shameful" that "representatives of the Hungarian Dollar Left are inciting

governments across Europe against the Hungarian child protection law". He said the European Parliament's siding with the law's opponents was "outrageous".

PRESIDENT NOVÁK MEETS CHARITY COUNCIL ORG LEADERS, UKRAINE REFUGEES

Hungarians help out in trouble, President Katalin Novák said at a meeting with leaders of Charity Council organisations and Ukrainian refugees at the presidential Sandor Palace on Wednesday, underlining the need to support those fleeing the war in Ukraine and those who have stayed in the country. Everything possible must be done to bring an end to the war as soon as possible and secure a peaceful settlement, Novák said. The president noted that Hungarian charity organisations have helped some 2 million people who had fled the war via Hungary. She said she will pay a visit to western Ukraine's Transcarpathia region next month to provide support to people there. Novák thanked the representatives of the Catholic Caritas, the Hungarian Reformed Church Aid, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, the Hungarian Interchurch Aid, the Hungarian Baptist Aid and the Hungarian Red Cross for their work. The refugees in attendance at the event included children from Ukraine's Dnipro, Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts, among others.

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ÁDER: WORLD FURTHER AWAY FROM REACHING CLIMATE GOALS

Compared with when 15 climate goals were adopted in Paris 8 years ago, the world now is further away achieving them, János Áder said at a UN meeting on water issues in New York. The former president of the republic, who is a member of the global body's Water and Climate Leaders grouping, said that the world was also further away from attaining the aims on water and hygiene than when they were set in 2015.

Growing populations and higher energy consumption is boosting demand for water, he said, and based on current trends, by 2050 roughly of half of the world's population will live in regions where water is scarce.

Investments in water infrastructure must be increased, Áder said. Also, noting that there are now 32 UN agencies handling water issues as against 28 four years ago, he cast doubt on the efficiency of the UN's operations in this area. Áder briefed the meeting on Hungary's water-related measures related to maintenance of its 4,000km river dam system, the 41 billion forints (EUR 106m) spent on biodiversity and developing national parks in the past 10 years, and the creation of the Danube-Drava-Mura biosphere reserve. Fully 95% of waste water is returned to the environment after treatment, he added.

Future tasks include preventing the desertification of central Hungary,

making better use of solar and wind energy, and the speeding up of upgrades to the water utility network, he said. The 2023 Water Conference started on Wednesday at the United Nations. Áder will speak on Thursday, while Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, will address the debate on Friday.

STATE SECY VISITS TRANSCARPATHIA

Tristan Azbej, Hungary's state secretary in charge of aid to persecuted Christian communities, made a "solidarity visit aimed at assessing the situation" to Transcarpathia at the invitation of Greek Catholic Bishop Nil Lushchak on Wednesday. During his visit, Azbej said "the most urgent and important step is to stop the bloodshed; an immediate ceasefire and peace talks are needed". The state secretary visited a refugee shelter operated by the Greek Catholic Church at Velykyi Bereznyi (Nagyberezna) near Uzhhorod (Ungvár), and said the Hungarian government had used some 130 billion forints (EUR 334m) since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine to help the war's victims. Azbej spoke highly of the charity organisations and churches active in Transcarpathia. He said the local Greek Catholic bishopry had received a sum of 120 million forints from the Hungarian government to provide shelter to some 300,000 people that had fled to western Ukraine from the war-hit regions of the country, as well as to "families irrespective of ethnicity that have lost their bread-winning members".

The state secretary also met ethnic Hungarian leaders in Transcarpathia, and said "the greatest problem is to provide services for domestic refugees".

GOVT RAISES COMPENSATION FOR FARMERS TO HUF 50.6 BN

The government is increasing compensation to farmers fourfold to help them offset their losses due to last year's extreme drought, Agriculture Minister István Nagy said on Wednesday. Fully 50.6 billion forints (EUR 129.1m) will be awarded to around 22,000 farmers by March 31, he said.

Roughly 80% of Hungary's farmland, or 1.45 million hectares, were harmed by the drought, and 49.7 billion forints will be spent on mitigating the damage, he said. Insurance subsidies introduced in the past decade have also helped, Nagy said, noting that insurance companies paid a further 41 billion forints in connection with last year's extreme weather.

The government has set up an operative body to handle drought emergencies, and it has taken measures to ensure the sector's financial stability, the minister said. The government acted on the body's proposal to delay farmer loan repayments to the end of 2023, while it also raised European Union subsidy pre-financing to 322 billion forints, he added. Thanks to such measures and a generally robust Hungarian economy, Hungarian agriculture has weathered the situation, he said.

CHRISTDEM MEP URGES OPPORTUNITIES OVER AID FOR AFRICA

Africa should be provided opportunities rather than aid, György Hölvényi, an MEP of Hungary's co-ruling Christian Democrats, said in a statement on Tuesday, adding that the EU should back local initiatives that allow people to make a living in their homeland. Hölvényi told a European parliamentary conference he organised on job creation in Africa that each year around 12 million young people enter the continent's job market which has only 3 million job opportunities. In order to have a chance of staying in their homeland, they must receive education that is competitive on the 21st century job market, he added.

He said the aim of Tuesday's event was for European decision-makers to hear from African speakers that migration was not a solution to the challenges faced by developing countries. Because Africa's most valuable resource is its young population, they need to be provided education and training in order to allow the continent's economies to pursue a 21st-century development path, Hölvényi said.

Supporting emigration deprives Africans of a chance for development, the MEP argued. "Africa's annual growth rate of over 5% requires both a large and a skilled workforce," he said. Hölvényi called for aligning education, vocational training and investments with job creation schemes so that Africa's youth can be an opportunity rather than a burden.

Hölvényi noted that the EU was allocating 13% of its development funds meant for Africa towards education until 2027, adding that a "far more results-oriented plan" was needed. Also, the EU should boost cooperation with local organisations, he added. Tapera Muzira of the African Development Bank said the continent's agriculture sector was in great need of skilled labour. This, he said, was especially important when it came to managing the food crisis and fighting climate change.

ELECTION CTTEE REJECTS LMP'S REFERENDUM BID ON REQUIRING LOCAL CONSENT FOR BATTERY PLANTS

The National Election Committee (NVB) on Tuesday rejected a referendum initiative by opposition LMP on requiring the consent of local communities before building battery plants. The green party had intended to ask citizens whether public consent in a local referendum should be required for the construction of a battery plant in a given locality. The NVB rejected the question on the ground that it did not meet the constitutional stipulation that the circumstances for ordering a local referendum on the basis of subject matter could only be regulated in exceptional cases. It said the rules of procedure provided by the laws currently in effect were suitable for meeting LMP's goal of requiring the consent of local communities for the construction of battery plants.

The NVB said that if the regulation proposed by LMP were to enter into force, an invalid local referendum would prevent the construction of a battery plant even if a majority of those who voted were in favour of the project.

Because of this, the initiative is out of line with the constitution, which therefore means it is "aimed at an implicit amendment to the constitution", which cannot be subject to a referendum. The NVB's decisions are not legally binding and can be appealed at the Kuria, Hungary's supreme court, within 15 days.

PRISON CHIEFS MEET CONSULAR REPS OF 58 COUNTRIES

Hungary's prison service directorate BvOP met the consular representatives of 58 countries to brief them about the dramatic increase in the number of foreign nationals held in custody in Hungarian prisons, BvOP said on Wednesday. János Schmechl, BvOP's deputy chief in charge of security and detention, told the diplomats that there were currently more than 2,500 people smugglers held in Hungarian prisons from 73 countries. A part of them are Romanian, Serbian, Ukrainian and Bulgarian nationals, while many of them come from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iran, Yemen, Jordan, Iraq or Tunisia, Schmechl added. Some of the smugglers are from Cuba, Dominica, Brazil or Vietnam, he said. BvOP said that the diplomats had received detailed information about the

directorates newly established regional centres, the digital and technological innovations used in the prisons, the rules on receiving foreign nationals, as well as about the new government decree defining the rules on suspending the custody of a foreign national.

CITIES' POPULATION EDGES DOWN AS SUBURBS GROW

The number of permanent residents fell in county seats and several Budapest districts last year, as suburbs saw growing populations as well as property price rises, according to a property analyst. The population grew by 821 people in Érd, near Budapest, where property prices also grew by 16% to 753,000 forints/sqm. Other localities near the capital saw the same trend, with the population of Vácrtót growing by 12% and property prices by 17%, László Balogh of real estate website ingatlan.com said on Wednesday. In other suburbs such as Erdőkertés, Nagytarcsa, Biatorbágy and Gyömrő, populations grew by some 300-400 people, while property prices rose by 4-21%, he said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the population of Budapest fell by 13,000 last year to 1.63 million, and cities like Pécs, Szeged, Debrecen and Miskolc lost 1,100-2,200 inhabitants, the website said. Still, property prices in cities grew by 13-21%, to 660,000-813,000 forints. The price increase in districts and country seats already losing inhabitants was due to continued high demand due to investors and the population loss

came to only 1% in those cities, ingatlan.com noted. Also, certain Budapest neighbourhoods and university districts remain popular with investors who are driving up prices, the statement said.

NEARLY 8,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY

Fully 4,820 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 3,149 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 68 people, ORFK said on Wednesday.

HUNGARY RECORDS 641 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 16 DEATHS LAST WEEK

Fully 641 new Covid-19 infections were confirmed last week, while 16 fatalities were registered in connection with the virus, the Coronavirus Press Centre said on Wednesday. The number of active infections stands at 4,728. Currently, 396 coronavirus patients are being treated in hospital, 13 intubated on a ventilator. Altogether 6,422,087 people have been vaccinated against the coronavirus, with 6,209,824 having received a second jab, 3,905,122 a third, and 424,959 a fourth. The number of registered infections since the start of the pandemic has reached 2,198,461 in Hungary, while there have been 48,791 deaths. Fully 2,144,942 people have made a recovery.

RENOIR, CSONTVÁRY, GULÁCSY EXHIBITIONS IN BUDAPEST IN 2023

The Budapest Museum of Fine Arts will host a large-scale Renoir exhibition and a show celebrating Hungary's Tivadar Csontváry-Kosztka while the National Gallery will present an exhibition of the oeuvre of Lajos Gulácsy this year, the director general of the two museums said on Tuesday. The Renoir exhibition opening on September 21 and focusing on the French Impressionist master's human figure paintings will be the first ever comprehensive show hosted by Budapest, László Baán told a press conference.

Another major exhibition opening in the Fine Arts Museum on April 13 will celebrate the 170th birth anniversary of renowned Hungarian painter Tivadar Csontváry-Kosztka (1853-1919), Baán said. It will present over 40 titles including his major works such as the Ruins of the Theatre of Taormina, Waterfall at Jajce, Pilgrimage to the Cedars in Lebanon and his emblematic oil-on-canvas The Lonely Cedar inspired by his trips to the Middle East. The third, retrospective exhibition opening in the Hungarian National Gallery on April 6 will feature some 200 works including 84 paintings by Lajos Gulácsy (1882-1932), one of the most unique figures of 20th-century Hungarian art. The titles on display include Magic, Dante Meeting with Beatrice, Paolo and Francesca, Sunday Afternoon in Como and Na'Conxypan, the country Gulácsy had in his imagination.