

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Parliament floodlights turned off for Earth Hour 2023

MTI/Péter Lakatos

UPCOMING EVENTS

Parliament meets, votes on Finland's NATO bid

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY-SERBIA PARTNERSHIP HELPS HANDLE UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

The strategic partnership and friendship between Hungary and Serbia greatly helps Hungary better handle the unprecedented challenges it faces, the foreign minister said on Saturday.

Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook after talks between the prime ministers of Hungary and Serbia in Belgrade that the majority of central European countries were facing challenges in three areas: the economy, security and energy supplies. The strategic alliance that Hungary maintains with Serbia helps handle challenges in all three areas, he added. The most important challenge concerns energy supplies, with the two countries "holding on each other more strongly than ever before" in order to guarantee long-term energy supplies, he said. In line with a long-term agreement with Gazprom, natural gas supplies for Hungary arrive through Serbia and Hungary stores several million cubic metres of gas for Serbia, he added. An agreement has been signed under which this year Hungary will again keep gas in Hungarian storage capacities for Serbia, he said. Preparations are under way to double the capacity of the electricity interconnector between the two countries and to make electricity transport easier, faster and simpler, he added.

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NOVÁK: 'WISE DECISIONS' IN BRUSSELS TO BENEFIT LOCAL COMMUNITIES

President Katalin Novák attended the inauguration of a tourist centre in Barcs, in south-western Hungary, on Friday, and said "if wise decisions are made in Brussels, they will make Europe and its local communities richer". The president referred to the new facility, built at a cost of 400 million forints (EUR 1bn), as an example of the benefits of Hungary's European Union membership "when decision-makers do what they are supposed to do". On another subject, Novák noted that nearby Croatia was now a member of the Schengen zone and the River Dráva "no longer separates Hungary and Croatia but creates a link". Concerning the war in Ukraine, the president said Hungary was making "every effort in the interest of a ceasefire and peace talks". After the inauguration ceremony, the president made a bicycle tour in the area and visited a local Roma community.

GULYÁS: HUNGARY GDP AT 77% OF EU AVERAGE

Hungarian GDP is 77% of the European Union average, up from 75% in 2022, the head of the prime minister's office said on Friday, adding that its performance belied the "crowing of leftist experts and the opinions of the central bank". Commenting on the latest Eurostat

report on the development of EU member states, Gergely Gulyás said Hungary had grown despite "two years of Covid and one of war". Hungary's economy had grown by over 10% since Fidesz came to power in 2010, closing the gap with the EU average by over 10%, he said. The trend continued last year, showing the resilience of Hungarian economy in times of crisis, he said. Hungary is keeping up with the development of central Europe and whittling away at its disadvantage against long-standing EU member states, he said. The goal is that the country should be among the five most developed countries of the EU, he added. Hungary is now level pegging with Portugal, which has been a member state since 1986, and ahead of Greece -- also in the EU since the 80s -- by 8-9 percentage points, Gulyás said. Hungary's development within central Europe is second only to Poland's, which has a two-point advantage, he said. Hungary also has 4,691,000 jobholders, 26,000 more than last year, after a year that tested the resilience of companies with soaring energy prices, he said. The country is working to swiftly catch up with the EU average, and as soon as the Russia-Ukraine war is concluded and energy prices are curbed it will advance even further, he said. Asked to comment on "leftist voices" reporting that Hungary's economy lagged in EU comparison, Gulyás said that in the past weeks, mostly left-liberal economic institutions, "which

unfortunately include the central bank", have warned of a growing gap between the EU average and Hungary. "In fact the truth is that while energy prices have soared and the world and Europe are facing serious inflation, the Hungarian economy has grown considerably, narrowing the gap with EU average," he said.

ORBÁN PAYS VISIT TO SERBIA

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán paid a working visit to Serbia on Saturday and held talks with President Aleksandar Vučić in Belgrade, his press chief said. Topics discussed at the meeting included the EU integration of Serbia and the Western Balkans, bilateral relations and the war in Ukraine with a special focus on promoting a ceasefire and peace talks, Bertalan Havasi told MTI.

ORBÁN HOLDS INTERIOR AFFAIRS CABINET MEETING ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán held a cabinet meeting to review interior affairs in his Budapest office after concluding a working visit to Belgrade on Saturday afternoon, his press chief told MTI. The meeting was attended by Interior Minister Sándor Pintér, Gergely Gulyás, the head of the prime minister's office, Antal Rogán, who heads the prime minister's cabinet office, government commissioner

Dávid Héjj, as well as state secretaries Gábor Bordás, Péter Takács and János Nagy, Bertalan Havasi said.

ORBÁN VOWS TO 'PROTECT FARMERS AGAINST UKRAINE GRAIN DUMPING'

"We will protect farmers from the harmful effects of Ukrainian grain dumping," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Facebook on Friday. At a European Union summit that had ended earlier in the day, countries of central Europe agreed to cooperate and ensure protection to agricultural producers against "harmful effects of Ukrainian grain dumping," Orbán said. He added that their actions would be coordinated by Mateusz Morawiecki, his Polish counterpart.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY NOT TO SUPPORT UKRAINE'S INTEGRATION AS LONG AS HUNGARIAN SCHOOLS AT RISK

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó held talks with Ilze Brands Kheris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights of the United Nations, in New York on Friday evening and told her that Hungary could not support Ukraine's Transatlantic and European integration as long as ethnic Hungarian schools were "at risk" in the country. "While we are taking in refugee children from Ukraine in 1,300 schools and kindergartens in Hungary, there are

99 Hungarian primary and secondary schools in Ukraine that are at risk of being closed down because of the local education law," Szijjártó said on Facebook. Several laws have been passed in Ukraine since 2015 that gradually infringed on the rights of the neighbouring country's minorities to use their mother tongue, he said. Over the past eight years, Ukrainian authorities kept promising us to resolve this problem, but they have in fact done nothing to that effect," the foreign minister said, adding that he informed the UN assistant secretary-general about Hungary's position on Ukraine's integration.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: WATER CHALLENGES COULD TRIGGER UNMANAGEABLE MIGRATION CRISES

Unless the international community takes global challenges around water seriously, the world could face more international conflicts and unmanageable migration crises, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, addressing the United Nations 2023 Water Conference in New York on Friday. Humanity is facing its most complex challenges yet with regards to security, the economy and health, Szijjártó told the conference's plenary session, according to a foreign ministry statement. Many of these challenges pertain to nature, he said, noting that natural disasters were becoming increasingly common and tended to lead to greater food shortages.

Challenges around water deserve special attention, the minister said, noting that they are the cause of around 70% of natural disaster-related deaths. Forecasts show that by 2050, three billion people will be living in areas hit by droughts, 1.6 billion in flood-prone areas and 2.2 billion people will not have access to clean drinking water, Szijjártó warned, noting that a daily 1,000 children die worldwide due to drinking polluted water. "All these alarming facts and data show very clearly that water will be a real security risk in the future," Szijjártó said, adding that water-related challenges could also trigger armed conflicts as well as mass migration waves. The minister noted the "enormous efforts" Hungary has had to make over the last seven years to protect its borders from illegal migrants "who usually behave very aggressively and show absolutely no respect to our rules and regulations". This is also a matter of sovereignty, he said, arguing that no one had the right to violate Hungary's borders or infringe on Hungarians' right to decide whom they want to live together with. The dangers of migration can also be seen within the European Union, which, despite the efforts aimed at integrating migrants, has seen the emergence of parallel societies, a rise in the threat of terrorism and a faster spread of viruses, Szijjártó said. "So migration is a dangerous phenomenon and must be stopped" by tackling the root causes, he said, adding it was clear that water challenges were among the

most severe of those causes. Hungary is ready to do its share in tackling these root causes, Szijjártó said, noting that the country has developed world-class water management technologies. Hungary has recently launched 800 million euros worth of tied-aid schemes and international development programmes based on its water technologies in countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, Kenya, Rwanda, Mali, Cape Verde, Ecuador and Kyrgyzstan, he said. Szijjártó called on the international community to take the challenges around water seriously, underscoring the importance of monitoring countries' fulfilment of their commitments in line with the UN's sustainable development goals. If the world does not take the water-related challenges seriously, more international conflicts will break out and millions will migrate, which will lead to unmanageable migration challenges, Szijjártó said. "It would be much better to avoid that," he said. "Hungary stands ready to contribute."

OFFICIAL: HUNGARY MPS WANT REASSURANCE BEFORE VOTE ON SWEDEN'S NATO ACCESSION

Hungarian MPs are waiting for reassurance from Swedish government members in order to be able to support Sweden's NATO accession with a large majority, similarly to Finland's accession bid, the prime minister's

political director said on Sunday. Balázs Orbán told public radio that "it is clear as day that we support Sweden's accession, with the government having already passed a decision, and it is now up to parliament, but there is a little problem". "Some Hungarian MPs do not feel comfortable because they have witnessed in recent years that certain Swedish government members made a habit of continually questioning the state of democracy in Hungary, they kept insulting Hungarian voters and MPs, and through them the whole of Hungary," he said. Orbán said Hungary did not want to take a position in matters of Swedish domestic political affairs and expects the same from Sweden concerning Hungarian issues. "Hungarian MPs are waiting for reassurance that there are no political debates between them anymore and there are no problems with the basics of Hungarian-Swedish cooperation," he added. In the case of Finland, there is a "unique historic friendship and alliance," he said. "It seems that we have managed to get reassurance from the Finns that these problems will not persist in the future" but in the case of Sweden, there is a different situation, he added. Commenting on the Russian-Ukraine war, he said there would be only losers in this war and Europe's as well as Hungary's interest lied in a ceasefire and peace talks to start as soon as possible. Commenting on the armed conflict, which was the highlighted topic of the European summit this week, he said Hungary supported

the proposals on developing defence cooperation so that member states could protect themselves against any form of military threat. However, it refuses to allow weapons from Hungary to make their way to the Ukrainian-Russian frontier as a result of this cooperation, he added. "We support the joint acquisition of weapons but only the Hungarian army and Hungarian soldiers will receive them, so we maintain the principle that we do not participate in the conflict by way of arms deliveries," he said.

MTVA: JOBBIK LOSES LAWSUIT AGAINST MTI

Opposition Jobbik has lost a lawsuit against Hungarian public media, MTVA's press and marketing office said in a statement on Friday. The Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, has ruled in a binding decision that Hungarian news agency MTI's national press release service (OS) had the right to refuse publication of a statement released by Jobbik, MTVA said. The Kúria's ruling confirmed once again that the OS service has the right to refuse to publish any statement that may breach the privacy rights of an individual, and that MTI was entitled to editorial freedom, the statement said. According to the court's ruling, provisions of the Act on Media Services and Mass Communication related to the national news agency do not guarantee anyone carte-blanche to demand publication of a specific statement via its OS service. MTVA's

statement noted that the opposition Democratic Coalition has lost seven lawsuits against Hungarian public media in connection with the way MTI handled press releases. Under the Kúria's most recent decision, Jobbik must pay the full legal costs to the defendant, Duna Médiaszolgáltató Nonprofit Zrt.

PÁRBESZÉD CHANGES NAME TO PÁRBESZÉD- GREENS

The opposition Párbeszéd will change its name to Párbeszéd-Greens and Benedek Jávor will head the party's list at the European Parliamentary elections, its co-leaders said on Sunday announcing decisions made at a party congress on the previous day. Bence Tordai said at an event dubbed "Go for 2024! - With Párbeszéd (Dialogue) for a Green Hungary" that green politics required the understanding of what sustainability meant and a realisation that there were problems with the basic logic, approach and operation of the current system. Rebeka Szabó said green politics went beyond trying to improve environmental protection in the current regime but involved a critique of the regime. She said the party was not only critical of the "hybrid local regime built on stealing public monies" but it was also critical of a global capitalist regime that put profit above the people's security and children's future. Tordai said a green Europe and green Hungary had to be built where green solutions

are promoted and green principles are enforced on all levels of decision making, including locally, on national level and throughout the EU. Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony, addressing the event's local municipality section, said that cities must play a leading role in slowing down climate change.

LMP TO HOLD DEMO AGAINST REJECTION OF PARTY'S REFERENDUM BID ON BATTERY PLANTS

Opposition LMP will hold a demonstration against a recent decision by the National Election Committee's (NVB) rejecting the party's referendum initiative on requiring the consent of local communities before building battery plants, Krisztina Hohn, the welfare spokeswoman of the party, said on Sunday. In its decision last week, the committee rejected LMP's bid 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. Hohn told an online press conference that "had the NVB approved our initiative, locals could have decided whether or not they want to have a battery plant built in their immediate neighbourhood". She said LMP was organising a demonstration for April 4 in front of NVB's headquarters in central Budapest which would give Hungarians the opportunity to express their opinion on battery plant projects that are "energy guzzlers, will pollute our rivers and allow their foreign owners to exploit and seize our arable land". Hohn noted that LMP had appealed NVB's decision, but "has no illusions, having learnt over the past 13 years that [ruling] Fidesz has completely dismantled the democratic system and would force its will through even if people strongly oppose it."

OFFICIAL: PEACE IN W BALKANS HUNGARY'S IMPORTANT SECURITY POLICY INTEREST

Ensuring peace in the Western Balkans is one of the most important security policy interests for Hungary and a trying task, a state secretary of the defence ministry said at a Hungarian army base in Kecskemét, in central Hungary, welcoming a Hungarian unit on return from a KFOR mission on Sunday. "Considering Hungary's

security policy interests, Hungarian troops have been participating in operations in the Balkans since 1995," Tamás Vargha said, adding that Hungary had contributed staff officers and army contingents to NATO's KFOR mission since 1999. He noted that the more than 100 troops who performed their task on a high level in the KFOR Tactical Reserve Battalion have further strengthened the respect for the Hungarian armed forces. Addressing the ceremony, Romulusz Ruszin-Szendi, Commander of the Hungarian Armed Forces, said that "members of the reserve battalion have again proved to Hungary's allies that Hungarian troops can be counted on". Troops of the battalion have performed 250 tasks since last December when they were assigned to serve to strengthen NATO forces as tension ran high between Kosovo Serbs and local Albanians in northern Kosovo, he said.

ALMOST 12,000 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 5,849 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 5,814 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 70 people, ORFK said on Sunday. Budapest received 43 people, 24 children among them, by train.

BUDAPEST TO GET ANOTHER 31 CAF TRAMS

The Budapest Public Transport Centre (BKK) will take delivery of another 31 trams from Spain's CAF after signing a contract with the central government on support for the order. BKK said the trams will be put into service between

September 2024 and November 2026. BKK noted that the government earlier cleared 54 billion forints (EUR 139m) in European Union funding for the purchase of a total of 51 of the CAF trams.

AUDI HUNGÁRIA MANAGEMENT, UNION REPS REACH WAGE AGREEMENT

The management of Audi Hungária has reached an agreement with union representatives on this year's pay rise, the local unit of German car maker Audi said on Friday. Union leaders approved the management's latest offer at a meeting on Friday, Audi Hungária said. Audi Hungária will raise base pay by 17% from April 1, and it will incorporate 3% of the variable wage into base pay from July 1. Audi Hungária employed close to 12,000 people at the end of last year.