

PHOTO OF THE DAY



President Novák meets Turkish boy rescued by Hungarian team in Adana

UPCOMING EVENTS

President Novák on official visit to Türkiye

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Parliament meets

Stats office prelim reports on industrial producer prices, foreign trade and demographics in Feb 2023

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY'S ENERGY SECURITY NOT ENSURED WITHOUT TURKIC STATES

Hungary's energy security cannot be ensured without the Turkic states "in the present or the future", Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said on Thursday.

He added, however, that "our relations are not just energy friendships". Europe is facing an energy crisis, and this year is set to be even more difficult than the last because of the loss of around 60 billion cubic metres of Russian natural gas, the increased demand due to the reboot of the Chinese economy and limited European LNG capacities, Szijjártó told a meeting of the energy ministers of the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS), according to a ministry statement. Hungary treats energy security as a physical issue, rather than an ideological one, Szijjártó said. It has never and will never discriminate against any energy source or delivery route on a political basis, he added. Diversification to Hungary means procuring energy from as many resources and via as many routes as possible, not swapping one dependence for another, Szijjártó said. He said it was not an exaggeration to say that Hungary's energy security could not be guaranteed, either now or in the future, without the Turkic states.

SZIJJÁRTÓ HIGHLIGHTS ROLE OF TÜRKIYE IN HUNGARY'S LONG-TERM ENERGY SUPPLY

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Thursday highlighted the role of Türkiye in Hungary's long-term energy supply, noting that the country last year received 4.8 cubic metres of gas via the TurkStream pipeline. As regards new energy sources, the minister said the most realistic option was importing from Azerbaijan, noting that a political agreement had been reached on deliveries of around 100 cubic metres of Azeri gas to Hungary this year. Afterward, annual deliveries could reach 2 billion cubic metres in the framework of a long-term contract, he added. Szijjártó said Hungary's friendship with the Turkic states was not based on energy supply. "We were already on good terms back when those who are now eager to get their picture taken with [Azeri] President Aliyev arrogantly and condescendingly waved off our relationship with Azerbaijan," he said. Under a political agreement, the Azeri gas will flow via Türkiye, and the companies involved are now in talks on the details, he said. Szijjártó also underscored the need for infrastructure developments in southeast Europe, noting that Hungary was cooperating in the matter with Bulgaria and Romania and would sign the relevant

agreement at the end of April. Concerning nuclear energy, he said Europe was on the verge of a "major breakthrough" on the use of nuclear power, given that seven European Union member states were planning to build nuclear power plants. Szijjártó said there was a significant opportunity for cooperation on nuclear energy within the OTS, arguing that Türkiye was building a plant with the same technology and contractor as Hungary, while Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were among the world's leading uranium producers. Hungary has signed agreements on nuclear training with every OTS member state, he said. This, the minister added, would give them the competitive advantage of being immune to the "irrational volatility" of the international energy markets. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Hungary had benefitted greatly from becoming an observer in the OTS, adding that it made it easier to guarantee the country's energy security. Answering a question, Szijjártó said Hungary's energy cooperation with Russia was unaffected by the country's inclusion on the Russian government's list of "unfriendly countries" along with every other EU member state. The long-term gas delivery agreement with Russia is reliable, and Gazprom is a reliable partner, he added. As regards the war in Ukraine, he said Hungary urged an immediate ceasefire and peace talks, adding that talks often led to a situation in

which the status quo at the end of the war differed from the outcome of the peace agreement. He also underlined Hungary's support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Concerning Hungary's ratification of Sweden's NATO accession, Szijjártó said this had to be done by parliament, adding that the government's position in the matter was clear. "I don't think it would be helpful for anyone to apply any kind of pressure," Szijjártó said. "Instead I recommend respect as the form of behaviour to be displayed by everyone."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY'S ROLE IN EUROPEAN CAR INDUSTRY 'AKIN TO LIFE INSURANCE POLICY'

Hungary having become a crucial player in Europe's auto industry is "akin to an economic life insurance policy", Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, told a conference on Thursday. Hungary also happens to be competing for electric battery plants with countries that most strongly attack Chinese investments in their political communication, Szijjártó told a year-opening event of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MKIK). Concerning criticisms levelled at electric battery plants, Szijjártó said the only question was where they would be built, not if they would be built at all. "Because when we're competing for these investments,

we are competing with countries that most strongly attack us, or the Chinese, or Chinese investments in their political communication,” he said. He added that the regulations investments in Hungary must meet were far stricter than European Union rules. The minister said Hungary was already the world’s fourth largest electric battery producer, adding that batteries had been Hungary’s leading export product over the last 13 months. “So we can’t say that ‘this is something secretive’ or that ‘we don’t know what will come of it,’” Szijjártó said. He said it was only recently that the opposition had started to say that “it would be better if these plants created tens of thousands of jobs in places other than Hungary”.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Hungary had become a meeting point for Eastern and Western investments, which protected the country from uncertainties and guaranteed long-term economic growth. Hungary has plants from all three German premium carmakers and three of the world’s seven leading battery makers are also present in the country, he said, adding that Western companies had become completely dependent on their Eastern partners in the sector. Commenting on the debate over why the government was supporting large multinational companies over small and medium-sized firms, Szijjártó said: “This is a hypocritical question to ask. It’s not a question of either-or, but

rather both-and.” He added that the government supported a larger share of the investments by Hungarian businesses. Szijjártó said one of the most significant forms of support Hungarian firms were receiving was that the government was bringing large investments to Hungary that guaranteed a long-term demand for their products and services. He said last year’s record-high output by the electronics and automotive sectors demonstrated the success of the strategy aimed at boosting the role of Hungarian suppliers.

On another subject, Szijjártó said steps needed to be taken against the re-emergence of a world divided into blocs, arguing that this was against Hungary’s and central Europe’s interests. Instead, the world needs connectivity, meaning cooperation based on mutual respect and mutual benefits, he added.

FIDESZ MEP: EP ‘HAS NO RIGHT TO INTERFERE’ WITH ITALY LGBTI LEGISLATION

European Union member states have the right to base family policy on Judeo-Christian values, “and the European Parliament or any other EU institutions have no right to pass judgement or interfere” in the decision, an MEP of ruling Fidesz told the EP’s plenary session on Wednesday. At the discussion on Italy’s decision to ban local authorities’ practice to register as

parents both members of same-sex couples raising children together, Helena Dalli, the Commissioner for Equality, said the children of same-sex couples had the same rights as any other children, and called on member states to respect and protect those rights. Dalli said that while member states have the right to accept or reject the concept of same-sex parents, EU legislation may impact their decisions on particular issues. Thus, a proposal adopted in last December may compel member states to recognise both parents if they had been registered as such in another member state, she said.

Fidesz MEP Ernő Schaller-Boros said the democratically elected Italian government has the sovereign right to decide on the matter. Family law is rooted in every nation’s history, culture and values. The field is under the exclusive competency of the member states, he said.

CHRISTDEM MEP CALLS ON EU TO RELY ON CHURCHES IN SOLVING LEBANON CRISIS

In tackling the crisis in Lebanon, the European Union must not ignore the role of churches, which fulfil vital social tasks in the country, György Hölvényi, an MEP of junior ruling party KDNP, told a conference in Brussels on Wednesday. Hölvényi, who headed the EU mission observing the elections in Lebanon in 2022, noted that parliamentary seats had been

divided equally among Christian and Muslim representatives. "This is a token of stability after the bloody civil war" that ravaged the country, he said.

"The state is mired in corruption, GDP has plunged by 50%% in the past 4 years, one-third of Lebanese citizens do not have enough to eat and in a country of six million, one million school-age children do not go to school," he said. Meanwhile, the country is also fending for 1.5 million Syrian refugees, he added.

As the representatives of peace and dialogue, religious communities can play an important role in solving those crises, he said. "And the EU stands by Lebanon as a friend and neighbour," he said. Former Lebanese Economy Minister Mansour Bteish also attended the event.

MOMENTUM MEP ADDRESSES EP PLENARY ON MEDIA SITUATION IN MEMBER STATES

The European Commission will include sections on the situation of the public media and the execution of rulings by the European Court of Human Rights in member states in its annual Rule of Law report which is due to be published in the summer, the EC's Vice President for Values and Transparency said in Brussels on Thursday. Vera Jourová told the plenary session of the European Parliament that the report will also deal with the use of

the Pegasus spyware, among other issues. Addressing the plenary, Anna Donáth, an MEP for Hungary's opposition Momentum, said that "the Hungarian government not only ignores the country-specific recommendations overall, but continues to dismantle democracy in Hungary through the way it uses EU monies." She said the Commission should not punish Hungarians by withholding EU funds from them "just because of the sins of the Hungarian government". Donáth criticised the government for using the issue of withholding funding "to stoke up anti-EU sentiment" in the Hungarian public, saying that "we all know what the consequence of continued Brussels-bashing may be". She called for allocating EU funds "directly to those most in need, to those the funds were aimed at", namely local governments, entrepreneurs and civil organisations. "This is the only way to ensure that the funds don't get stolen [by the government]," Donáth said.

EP SUSPENDS MOMENTUM MEP'S IMMUNITY

The European Parliament on Thursday suspended the immunity of Hungarian Momentum MEP Anna Donáth in a plenary session. MEPs approved the legal affairs committee's proposal on the matter by a show of hands. The lifting of Donáth's immunity was initiated by the district court of Kecskemét last June after criminal

proceedings were launched against her and others for defamation. In line with the EP's rules, the request to have Donáth's immunity lifted was submitted to the legal affairs committee by the EP president. Donáth did not oppose the suspension of her immunity.

TÁRSADALOMKUTATÓ: SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION FALLS FURTHER - SURVEY

Fidesz would win an even bigger victory than it did a year ago with the same support (52%) if parliamentary elections were held on Sunday, as the combined opposition (30%) would perform even worse, according to the results of a survey by think tank Társadalomkutató, sent to MTI on Thursday. The survey, conducted between March 27 and 29 by interviewing 1,000 people by phone, shows that, one year on, the governing parties still enjoy the support of every other voter and would be able to repeat their victory in the 2022 election.

Support for the opposition parties of the former left-wing alliance, which won 36% of domestic votes in 2022, has dwindled further, to 30% in the survey, the analysts added.

The parties of the alliance show a mixed picture: strongest among them is the Democratic Coalition, with 12% of voter support, followed by Momentum with 6% and Jobbik with 4%. They are followed by LMP with 3%, the Socialist Party with 2%

and Párbeszéd with 1%, all falling short of the support necessary for entering parliament. Péter Márky-Zay's Everybody's Hungary People's Party, which has officially become a political party since the 2022 election, only enjoyed the support of 2% of those interviewed in the survey.

Voters who left the former left-wing alliance presumably back other parties now: the Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party, with its current support of 10%, would clearly cross the threshold for parliamentary entry. The radical right-wing Mi Hazánk party has further improved its 6% election result; if elections were held on Sunday, 8% of voters would back them, according to the survey.

JUDICIAL OFFICE: OVER 1,000 FOREIGN PEOPLE SMUGGLERS IMPRISONED IN HUNGARY

More than 1,000 foreign people smugglers are serving legally binding prison sentences in Hungary, an official of the National Judicial Office (OBH) said on Thursday, adding that this was twenty times as many people as were imprisoned a few years ago. Whereas 2-3 years ago there were no more than 40-50 foreign nationals serving time in Hungarian prisons for people smuggling, by now their number has exceeded 1,000, Zoltán János Péter, head of the OBH's IT and electronic administration department, told a press conference in response to a question. The number of people

smuggling cases has risen most significantly at courts near the border, he added. He said this was also likely the reason why the number of new cases was on the rise again after steadily declining for several years.

LMP SLAMS GOVT FOR REJECTING PROPOSAL TO CURB GAS CONSUMPTION

Fossil fuels must be phased out, the deputy group leader of opposition LMP said on Thursday, slamming the government's decision to vote against a European Union proposal to curb gas consumption by 15%. The government insists on an economic policy that ruins the environment, Máté Kanász-Nagy told a press conference. At a time when 90% of the gas consumed comes from imports, the government is planning to build gas-fuelled plants to provide electricity for battery plants, Kanász-Nagy said. The imports would probably come from Russia, he added.

Instead, Kanász-Nagy called for an insulation programme for residential buildings and support for sustainable energy sources.

Hungary and Poland voted against a proposal of the European Commission to extend earlier legislation cutting the use of natural gas by 15% on Tuesday. At the time, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó warned that artificially curbing industrial consumption raised the risk of economic regression, and accused the EC of curbing member states' competencies on energy issues.

HUNGARIAN AI ECOSYSTEM PRESENTED IN BERLIN

The Hungarian artificial intelligence ecosystem was presented at the Hungarian embassy in Berlin on Thursday. "The goal is to build cooperation between research institutes, universities, and businesses of the Hungarian and German ecosystems," László Bódis, deputy state secretary at the cultural and innovation ministry, told MTI from Berlin by phone. Hungary's National AI Laboratory and the AI Coalition representing over 400 Hungarian organisations were presented at the event attended by Hungarian ambassador Péter Györkös, as well as German scientists and representatives of universities and businesses.

Roland Jakab, head of the AI Coalition, highlighted the cooperation between Hungarian research institute SZTAKI and Germany's Fraunhofer Institute, and said the goal was to "build even closer ties with German partners and launch joint projects".

CBANK SEES FASTER DISINFLATION FROM SECOND HALF OF 2023

Hungary's central bank has said it expects inflation to fall "moderately" in the coming months, then at a faster pace in the second half of the year. Inflation peaked in January, with both external and internal factors pointing

to disinflation, central bank director András Balatoni said on Thursday, presenting the National Bank of Hungary's latest quarterly Inflation Report. Disinflation is expected to accelerate in the second half of the year and return to the central bank tolerance band in 2024, he said. Analysing the inflation processes of the first two months, Balatoni said the February data (25.4% year/year) were in line with expectations. The increase in food prices -- and especially processed food prices -- remains high both historically and by international comparison, but the pace of price increases fell for the second month in a row in February.

The central bank already published the key figures of the Report on Tuesday: it forecast annual average inflation between 15.0% and 19.5% in 2023, unchanged from the December projection. For 2024, the NBH raised its inflation forecast to 3.0-5.0% from its December projection of 2.3-

4.5%. Among the external factors of disinflation, Balatoni listed falling energy and commodity prices as well as transportation costs. Declining household consumption has a "disciplining" effect on pricing behaviour, which will help accelerate the disinflation process in the second half of the year, according to the central bank's analysis. Companies' inflation expectations have declined significantly in all sectors, especially in retail trade, Balatoni said.

On the outlook for the real economy, he said the Hungarian economy continued to contract in the first quarter -- both on a quarterly and an annual basis, but the economy could pick up from the middle of the year thanks to positive fundamentals and the high level of employment. The NBH cut its economic growth forecast to between 0% and 1.5% in 2023 from its earlier projection of 0.5-1.5%. For 2024 and 2025, the forecast remains unchanged at 3.5-4.5% and

3.0-4.0%, respectively. The central bank expects gross wages to grow at around 14% in the business sector, and the dynamic increase in company profits provides room for this, Balatoni said. Wage growth could slow to around 10% next year, he added. Fielding a question, Balatoni said they do not expect the food price caps to be phased out. Phasing these out could add 1 percentage point to inflation, but a lot depends on the behaviour of retailers, he said.

MORE THAN 9,000 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 4,711 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 4,451 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 83 people, ORFK said on Thursday.