

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



President meets army chief for talks

MTI/Zoltán Máthé

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**NATO foreign ministers meet in Brussels**

**Stats office releases prelim Feb industrial output data**

**Events related to the war in Ukraine**

## TOP STORY

# NOVÁK: NATO MUST BE UNITED, STRENGTHENED

NATO must remain united and be strengthened, but issues over the alliance's expansion must be debated, President Katalin Novák said on Turkish state television late on Monday.

In response to a question concerning the NATO accession of Finland and Sweden, she said in an interview to the English-language news programme One on One on TRT World: "In these demanding times we have to stay united and we also have to show our strength." NATO is an important alliance which should be strengthened, she added. Commenting on NATO accession, she said: "We should have debates about these decisions; we should really consider the pros and cons." Novák said that both the Hungarian parliament and Türkiye had already decided on Finland's NATO accession, but concerning Sweden, there were tough debates taking place in the Hungarian parliament. "From Sweden's high representatives there were some unacceptable statements about Hungary," she said. "They were [baseless], biased statements about Hungary," she added. However, she said that her opinion as president was that "we should put these issues aside and say that in this very difficult and demanding situation we have more reasons to accept in the NATO Sweden than to refuse this."

## **NOVÁK: TÜRKIYE RELIABLE PARTNER ON ENERGY SUPPLY**

President Katalin Novák, in an interview with Turkish state television, said Hungary was very much dependent on Türkiye in terms of gas supplies from Azerbaijan. "Türkiye has been a very reliable partner," she told the English-language news programme One on One on TRT World in connection with Russian gas which also comes through Türkiye on the Turkish pipeline. On the question of the country's dependence on Russian energy, she said that Hungary's geographical position was such that dependence cannot be changed overnight, "but we are constantly working to reduce this dependence". In the interview Novák also expressed Hungary's condolences to the Turkish people in connection with the Feb. 6 earthquakes.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: INVITING UKRAINE TO NATO MINISTERIAL UNDERMINES UNITY**

The decision to invite Ukraine to a meeting of NATO foreign ministers undermines the principle of the alliance's unity, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary would only support its north-eastern

neighbour's aspirations for integration if it restored the rights of its Hungarian minority. "Hungary has come here in the hopes that nobody will question the validity of the alliance's earlier decision declaring that NATO would not be party to the war going on in our neighbouring country, and that everything must be done in order to prevent a direct conflict between NATO and Russia," Szijjártó said on Facebook ahead of the meeting. He said the decision to invite Ukraine's foreign minister undermined the principle of unity within NATO, adding that in spite of this, Hungary was attending the meeting "in the spirit of being constructive". The minister said he would make it clear that Hungary would only support Ukraine's aspirations for any kind of integration on the condition that it restored the rights held by its ethnic Hungarian community before 2015.

## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: COOPERATION WITH ROMANIA NEEDED TO ENSURE HUNGARY'S ENERGY SECURITY**

Romania will not only been seen as a transit route for natural gas but also as a country of origin, and Hungary wants a decision on the extraction of the Black Sea fields to be made as soon as possible, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said in Bucharest on Tuesday. Szijjártó

said current good cooperation between Hungary and Romania would ensure Hungary's gas supplies, noting that Romania will transit gas from Azerbaijan. The Hungary-Romania interconnector now has a capacity of 2.5 billion cubic metres, and Hungary is planning to import two billion cubic metres per annum, he added. The Romanian government has passed a decision to link its gas resources at the Black Sea with the country's distribution centre "from which there is already a pipeline to Hungary", he said. "It is in our interest that Romania should pass a decision allowing Black Sea gas to reach Hungary as soon as possible," he said.

On another subject, Szijjártó said the ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party's being part of the Romanian government had contributed to the development of Hungarian-Romanian cooperation "in a number of areas". He welcomed that Romanian leaders appreciated that party and its politicians. Romania's Hungarian community is "an asset, a bridge continuously helping us in efforts to improve cooperation between Hungary and Romania," Szijjártó said. He mentioned sports, environment protection, and European Union developments as areas in which ethnic Hungarian ministers had played key roles. Continuous improvement of bilateral cooperation is in Hungary's key strategic interest, the minister said,

noting close business ties and those of energy security. The turnover of bilateral trade with Romania reached record of 12 billion euros last year, while Romania has now become Hungary's third largest export market, Szijjártó said, noting the importance of continued development of transport routes.

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: FOURTH MOTORWAY TO ROMANIA TO BE COMPLETED BY 2030**

An agreement has been made to complete the fourth motorway between Hungary and Romania in 2030, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Tuesday.

The planned motorway is part of an earlier agreement to build motorways linking the two countries every five years, Szijjártó said in a joint statement with Sorin Mihai Grindeanu, Romania's deputy prime minister. "We succeeded in 2015 and in 2020, and another success is being readied for 2025 to link the M3 motorway in Hungary with the road network around Satu Mare (Szatmárnémeti)," he said. "Today we sealed the next success, for 2030, agreeing on a fourth motorway link," he added. The motorway between Budapest and Békéscsaba will be extended to the border, creating a link to the Romanian motorway network south of Salonta (Nagyszalonta), Szijjártó said. A border crossing point has been agreed upon and the people

of Méhkerék, in south-east Hungary, are making preparations, he said.

Developing cooperation between Hungary and Romania is a priority strategic interest both to serve the ethnic Hungarian community and to broaden economic relations, he added. Szijjártó said that bilateral trade exceeded 12 billion euros last year, a record-breaking figure, making Romania Hungary's third largest export market. "Developing cooperation is unimaginable without developing physical links between the two countries," he added.

Grindeanu thanked Hungary for its support for Romania's Schengen accession process. Commenting on the planned construction of a crossing station at the Hungarian-Romanian-Serbian triple border, he said the local authorities of Beba Veche (Obeba) supported the project.

### **FINMIN: HUNGARY'S HIGHER EDUCATION MODEL 'EXAMPLE TO OTHER COUNTRIES'**

The transfer of several Hungarian universities from the state to foundations is a model that other countries may follow, Mihály Varga, the finance minister, said on Tuesday, after talks with Luis Sanz, head of the advisory board of the International Association of Scientific Parks. Varga said the Hungarian government "succeeded in linking Hungarian universities to

the bloodstream of the economy, multiplying opportunities for cooperation and business ties."

By 2030, the government wants to see universities playing a key role in meeting the country's strategic objectives, the minister said, adding that Hungary's 14 scientific and innovation parks would be instrumental in linking universities with the local and national economic environment. Varga called Budapest's Óbuda University "one of the greatest and most popular universities" in Hungary, with 12,000 students at its 7 faculties teaching one third of the country's young engineers. Ever since the university has been run by a foundation, its budget for operations and developments has increased two-and-a-half fold, while teachers have benefitted from an unprecedented pay hike, Varga said, noting also that in international comparison Óbuda was considered "the best Hungarian university in IT and technical areas".

### **KARÁCSONY WELCOMES POPE'S UPCOMING VISIT TO BUDAPEST**

Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest, has welcomed the impending visit of Pope Francis, saying on Tuesday that it was "welcome news and an honour" to be hosting the pontiff in the capital in late April. Karácsony said on Facebook that he has held consultations with Michael

Wallace Banach, the apostolic nuncio, regarding the papal visit. "Pope Francis's ideas on humanity, social justice and environmental protection are close to mine as a green city leader..." Karácsony said, adding that Francis, in a Papal Encyclical, had laid down "a most progressive programme".

### **FORMER SOCIALIST LEADER QUITTING PARTY TO SET UP NEW FORMATION**

Attila Mesterházy, a one-time leader of the opposition Socialist Party, has announced that he is quitting the party and founding a new social democratic formation. The Socialist leadership has been pursuing a bad strategy for years, he said, explaining his decision on Facebook on Tuesday, adding that the party was by now a "shadow of its former self". The Socialists, the successor of Hungary's communist party, has consistently polled below the 5% threshold for seats in parliament in recent surveys. Mesterházy is joining with László Szakács, a former official of the leftist Democratic Coalition, to set up a new social democratic party called Socialists and Democrats. He said DK alone was not attractive to many social democratic voters. The Socialists said in response that the party acknowledged Mesterházy's decision. The Socialists would continue pursuing politics for a free, democratic and fair Hungary, it said

in a statement, and work towards combatting the cost of living crisis, to achieve a real wage increase and counterbalance the consequences of the government's ill-fated economic policies.

### **PÁRBESZÉD PROPOSES MEASURES TO TACKLE ENERGY SHORTAGE**

The opposition Párbeszéd party is proposing a series of measures to save Hungary from "serious energy shortages in the next 10 years," Benedek Jávor, an advisor to the party, said on Tuesday. Jávor said the Paks nuclear plant upgrade project should be terminated, "with regard to the war-related vis major and the Russian partner's non-compliance". "Hungary must become independent of Russian gas and nuclear fuel," he said. Second, the government should meet the European Commission's preconditions "in full" to ensure Hungary's access to EU funding, he told an online press briefing, adding that the funds could cover an upgrade of the country's electric grid and increase its capacity to handle inputs of 6,000 MW of solar and 3,500 MW of wind energy. Párbeszéd would also lift restrictions on the generation of this kind of energy, he said. Párbeszéd would also spend an annual 300 billion forints (EUR 796m) to help up to 150,000 families insulate their homes, Jávor said. He strongly advised against the "mass construction" of battery plants, and suggested that the country's

competitiveness could be improved through training and support for research and development.

### **GOVT BACKS HUNGARORING UPGRADES**

The government will support developments at the Hungaroring race track in Mogyoród, on the outskirts of the capital, state secretary for sport Ádám Schmidt said on Tuesday. The upgrade is scheduled to be ready by the time Hungaroring hosts the 2026 Formula 1 Hungarian Grand Prix, Schmidt said. The public procurement procedure for the project is planned to be called in the next 40-45 days, allowing construction to start in the autumn of 2024 and to be completed by the time the 2026 event gets under way, he added. The upgrades are a condition for extending Hungary's contract to host the F1 races from 2027 to 2032.

### **MORE THAN 7,700 UKRAINE REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY**

Fully 4,648 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 3,115 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 20 people, ORFK said. Fully 60 people, 20 children among them, arrived in Budapest by train.