

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Men's C2 qualifier at IFC World Cup 2023 in Szeged on May 13

MTI/Tamás Kovács

UPCOMING EVENTS

Foreign minister holds talks in Beijing

LMP's presser marking intl climate action day

Events related to the war in Ukraine

Stats office publishes construction sector figures for March

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY COMMITTED TO PRO-PEACE STANCE DESPITE EU'S 'ATMOSPHERE OF WAR'

Hungary is committed to its pro-peace stance even though the EU remains dominated by an "atmosphere of war" and most member states want to continue providing military support to Ukraine, the foreign minister said in Stockholm.

Everyone is of the view that European weapons deliveries are having a positive effect on the war, which is why many argue for supplying even more weapons, Péter Szijjártó said on Friday, during a break in an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers. These member states say Ukraine must be given all the support it needs for as long as it needs it, "and unfortunately, this applies primarily to military support", he said. But Hungary's position remains clear, he said, emphasising that "we want peace as soon as possible, because every minute this war continues costs more and more lives and poses a very serious threat of escalation." An immediate ceasefire and peace talks are needed, followed by a diplomatic settlement that can guarantee long-term peace and security in central Europe and on the entire continent, Szijjártó said. Meanwhile, he pointed out that under new Ukrainian laws, Hungarian-language schools in the country would no longer be able to operate from September. "This is an unacceptable situation," he said, arguing that the ethnic Hungarian community in Ukraine had already had their rights "seriously infringed", but "this would be such an unprecedented infringement that calls for a European reaction".

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SZIJJÁRTÓ SLAMS UKRAINE FOR DECLARING OTP BANK 'INTERNATIONAL SPONSOR OF WAR'

It is "scandalous" that Ukraine has placed OTP Bank on its list of "international sponsors of war", Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Stockholm on Friday, adding that until that is withdrawn, it will be "very difficult" for the Hungarian government to negotiate about further sanctions. It is "outrageous" that while Hungary is participating in the programme under which the European Union supports Ukraine with one and a half billion euros per month, the Ukrainian anti-corruption agency has placed the OTP Group on its list of "international sponsors of war" because the financial institution is still present in Russia, the foreign ministry cited Szijjártó as saying, in a statement. "OTP is Hungary's biggest bank. OTP has not violated any international laws. Its operations fully comply with all kinds of expectations and legislation. Placing it on the list of international sponsors of war is unacceptable and scandalous," the minister said on the sidelines of an informal meeting of European Union foreign ministers.

"Therefore I made it clear today that as long as OTP stays on this list, it will be very difficult for us to even enter into negotiations on the eleventh sanctions package, it will be very difficult for us to negotiate economic

restrictions that require additional sacrifices," Szijjártó said.

In a statement on Friday, OTP Bank rejected the accusations of Ukraine's anti-corruption agency (NAZK), which placed the Hungarian bank on its list of "international sponsors of war" on May 5. OTP emphasised that it condemned all aggression against a sovereign country, including the one committed against Ukraine, and expressed its commitment to supporting Ukrainian citizens and the country's economy. In addition to maintaining continuous service and lending activities, OTP has helped Ukraine with humanitarian aid worth a billion forints and provided long-term accommodation and care to hundreds of war refugees in Hungary. In response to the Ukrainian anti-corruption agency's argument that OTP Bank plays an important role in the Russian economy, the bank said that it had a market share of 0.17% in Russia. International banks and other companies with a significantly larger local presence were not included on the NAZK list, which in itself questions the credibility of the decision, OTP notes in the statement. OTP Bank also dismissed the accusation that it conducted activities in the occupied territories of Ukraine, and said that it operates in full compliance with local and international legislation in all its markets, including sanction regulations. Accordingly, it duly and immediately terminated all its activities in the occupied territories in 2014. As regards the accusation that OTP Bank provides "preferential loans" to

members of the Russian armed forces, OTP emphasised that the Russian Federation stipulates to all financial service providers in a law that those participating in the "special military operation" must be exempt from loan repayment and interest payments until December 31, 2023. After that date, repayment will continue. OTP Bank does not provide new loans to members of the armed forces either under preferential terms or in any other form, the bank said. In response to the Ukrainian argument that OTP Bank recognised the "people's republics of Luhansk and Donetsk", OTP stated that -- in line with the position of the EU and Hungary -- it never recognised the independence of these areas in any form.

SZIJJÁRTÓ TO HOLD TALKS IN CHINA ON MONDAY

Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, will hold talks in Beijing on Monday with his schedule including "critically important topics" to be discussed. In a post on Facebook, the minister said a major topic to be discussed is the Ukraine-Russia war. In this context, the foreign minister said efforts towards bringing about peace were of particular significance. Hungary supports the peace plan put forward by China, for two reasons, he said. "One is that the plan is about peace. The other is that the plan as such does exist," Szijjártó said. Szijjártó said another topic to focus on was Europe-China ties. Hungary

does not want those ties to sour, he said, adding that “we consider China not as a country posing a risk, but one with which cooperation can offer us enormous opportunities”. A western-eastern (Europe-China) economic cooperation may yield a division of labour that could benefit both sides, the foreign minister said, making reference to Hungary that has become “an integration point” of western-European and Chinese investments. In connection with the topic of the European automotive industry, Szijjártó said that “it is clear to us that the European automotive industry cannot successfully make a transformation into producing electric vehicles without the participation of Chinese suppliers”. He said that global efforts to combat climate change could not be successful without “putting transportation on a new, electric base”. During his visit, the Hungarian foreign minister will hold talks with Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Wang Yi, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang, Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao and the CEOs of several major companies, among others.

DEUTSCH: ‘EC WITHHOLDING FUNDS FOR POLITICAL REASONS’

The European Commission, under pressure from the Hungarian “dollar left” and the European left, is withholding EU development funds from Hungary for political reasons,

Tamás Deutsch, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, told public radio on Sunday. “I trust that the Commission will not maintain this unlawful state,” he told Kossuth Radio. Deutsch said “we, Hungarians, have had to face for years the fact that various European Union institutions are conducting show trials against our country, trying to put massive political pressure on Hungary based on lies, slander, smears, increasingly rude political labels without any basis.”

He said the reason for this was that Hungary rejected illegal migration, while Brussels pursues a pro-migration policy and “tries to force this down the throats of member states”. Deutsch said Hungarians say no to gender ideology madness, they want to protect their children and will not allow gender propagandists into kindergartens and schools. Hungary’s child protection law does not allow the right of parents to control their children’s education to be taken away from them, he said. He added that Hungary consistently took a stand on the side of peace in connection with the war in Ukraine, whereas Brussels took a pro-war, hawkish position and pursued a flawed sanctions policy. “Let’s admit, so far this political pressure has been successful, because Poland and Hungary have been unable to access the development funds they are entitled to,” the MEP said.

At the end of May, the General Affairs Council of the European Council will hold another hearing, the 11th, as part of the Article 7 procedure, Deutsch

said, but “they will say nothing new, nothing specific, the accusations will continue, the pre-drafter verdict will be delivered”. He noted that members of the European Parliament’s budgetary control committee will soon be visiting Hungary, but it is already clear that they will arrive with a preconception: “they will see corruption phantoms in Hungary by all means, they will inevitably perceive that the rule of law is in ruins,” he said. “They are not interested in what is happening here, no matter what facts we present to them that contradict their original stance, they will still repeat their original defamatory position,” Deutsch said.

PRESIDENT MEETS VISITORS AT HER OFFICE TO MARK 1ST ANNIV IN POST

Katalin Novák, Hungary’s president, greeted and guided around visitors in her Sándor Palace office in a public event marking the first anniversary of taking office, on Sunday.

Welcoming visitors in Sándor Palace is symbolising the president’s policy of open-doors to the public, communications director Vajk Farkas told MTI. President Novák guided groups of visitors through the historic halls and rooms where meetings with foreign dignitaries take place, Farkas said, adding the guests’ book including a note Pope Francis wrote in it during his recent visit was also shown to them. Among visitors lining

up to enter, the president conversed with regular participants at teachers' demonstrations about their situation and demands. She told them that she agreed with them on their concern of low wages which she said should be increased irrespective of EU funds. "This is what I've said before, and this is what I still think," the president said. Later in the day, in a Facebook post, the president thanked the several thousand people for visiting Sándor Palace on the weekend. Novák was elected president by parliament on March 10 and was sworn in on May 14 in 2022. She is serving as the sixth president since the 1989/90 change of political system.

LMP DEMANDS TO FIND OUT ABOUT PLANS FOR FURTHER BATTERY PLANTS

Opposition LMP is turning to the foreign ministry to find out how many more battery factories the government is conducting negotiations on. Speaking at a press conference on Saturday, LMP spokesman József Gál noted that Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Tuesday announced plans for another battery plant to be constructed in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, to which the government provided subsidies of 14 billion forints (EUR 37.6m). LMP believes it is unacceptable that after the battery plant to be built by CATL, which project was rejected by the public, the government has "secretly agreed" on

the construction of another battery plant in Debrecen, he said. LMP will request information from the foreign ministry to find out how many more companies the government is negotiating with and where else they are planning to set up battery factories.

PÁRBESZÉD-GREENS DEMAND DISCLOSURE OF PAKS UPGRADE INSURANCE CONTRACTS

The opposition Párbeszéd-Greens party demands the disclosure of all contracts related to the upgrade of the Paks nuclear plant, including the insurance contracts, since the existence of these is a basic condition of the implementation of the project, Benedek Jávor, a former MEP of Párbeszéd, said at an online press conference.

"Information related to Paks cannot be kept secret all the time! The Hungarian public has the right to know what is happening with the Paks project, which will be built with their money," Jávor said. Therefore, he said, Párbeszéd-Greens have submitted a written question to parliament to find out whether Hungarikum Biztosítási Alkusz, which won the public procurement tender for the insurance brokerage service called in 2020, has fulfilled its task undertaken in the procedure.

Jávor said the conclusion of the insurance contracts for the Paks II project is far behind schedule. He noted that Hungarikum Biztosítási,

owned by [businessman] Lőrinc Mészáros, received 450 million forints (EUR 1.2m) to seek out the best insurance options available on the market for the project. This was originally supposed to happen by September 27, 2021, but the deadline was extended twice, most recently until January 27, 2023. Several months have passed since then, Jávor said, and there is still no information on whether the insurance broker has completed its task, whether the project has valid insurance, who insures the upgrade of the power plant and under what conditions, and at what cost, he said. Jávor pointed out that nuclear energy production is a highly risky industry, which is why all nuclear power plants have extensive insurance systems. One of the basic conditions of the construction of the two new blocks of the Paks nuclear power plant is that the project has general liability insurance, construction-installation insurance and transport insurance, he said.

AGRMIN: EU DECREE REPLACES NATIONAL BAN ON UKRAINIAN IMPORTS

An EU decree taking effect on Saturday will replace member states' respective bans on Ukrainian grain imports, the minister of agriculture told a press conference at the Záhony border crossing. István Nagy said Hungary's earlier ban on imports of wheat, maize, rape- and sunflower seeds would stay in effect. He added that the EU decree would be "as rigorously enforced as the

national measures". Joint action by Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania has "made Brussels bureaucrats to step back... at last they understood that an influx of Ukrainian farm products created such a chaos on the European Union's internal markets that they had to handle it". The EU's decision will "at last facilitate trading in Hungary", the minister said, adding that "the wheat produced by Hungarian farmers will now go to markets where it was intended". Nagy said there was a verbal agreement with EU decision makers that the European ban would be maintained after June 5, but added that he was "expecting a relevant written declaration".

MAZSIHISZ ELECTS NEW PRESIDENT

Mazsihisz, the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, elected on

Sunday professor Andor Grósz its new president, the federation said on its website. Grósz was elected with 70 votes out of 107 to serve as Mazsihisz's president in the next four years, replacing András Heisler whose mandate has expired, it said. The new president said he wants to work in an environment where there is peace and calm without which progress was impossible to make. He thanked all those who voted for him. Grósz served before as the head of the board of Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection Public Foundation in Budapest.

HUNGARIAN WWII VICTIMS COMMEMORATED IN CZECHIA

A group of 36 Hungarian nationals, who died during the last days of the second world war, were

commemorated in a cemetery in Hazlov, in western Czechia, on Saturday. The commemoration was attended by representatives of the local authority, Hungary's embassy in Prague, the Association of Hungarians in the Czech Republic, as well as the Esterhazy Janos Association. On April 11, 1945, a train carrying Hungarian university students, teachers, and their families trying to return to Hungary came under an air raid by US fighters. As it turned out later, the US pilots had mistaken their target for a German ammunition train.

"These graves contain the ashes of mostly young people, whose destination was not Hazlov, yet, they remained here forever ... only for being at the wrong place at the wrong time," Hazlov Mayor Lenka Dvořáková told MTI after the ceremony.