

PHOTO OF THE DAY



A cycle responder in City Park

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office publishes April demographic figures

EU foreign trade ministers meet in Brussels

Events related to the war in Ukraine

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY FULLY SUPPORTS MOLDOVA'S EU INTEGRATION

The Hungarian government will provide "every assistance" to Moldova's endeavours to join the European Union, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Chişinău on Wednesday.

Following talks with his Moldovan counterpart Nicu Popescu, Szijjártó highlighted the geopolitical appreciation of the Eastern Partnership programme, and urged the earliest enlargement of the EU as well as promoting closer ties with countries in the region. Szijjártó noted the "strong positions" of Hungarian retail bank OTP and pharma Richter in Moldova's markets, adding that bilateral trade had posted a record 200 million euros last year. Meanwhile, Szijjártó regretted that WizzAir had temporarily suspended its operations in Moldova, and said he hoped services would be resumed "once security guarantees are in place". On another subject, Szijjártó said NATO members would not be reimbursed for earlier contributions aimed to finance the Afghan military, and expressed the Hungarian government's wish to use some of the funds, 120 million forints (EUR 322,000), to strengthen the security of Moldova. He said Moldova was situated "on the eastern border of the European Political Community, therefore we are mutually interested in each other's security."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: AZERBAIJAN TO START DELIVERIES TO HUNGARY THIS YEAR

On Hungary's energy diversification, Szijjártó said the start of gas deliveries from Azerbaijan, slated for later this year, would be an important step. The political agreement has been signed already, and trade talks have also been successful, he said. Hungary expects to receive 100 million cubic meters of gas this year already, he said. At the same time, development of south-eastern European infrastructure is key to the success of the project, he said. Current capacities would not be enough to make a difference in energy diversification, he added. "This is a task for the European Union. [South-east European countries] are right to expect the EU to fund developments to increase gas delivery capacities," he said.

Chişinău is hosting a meeting of the European Political Community on June 1, which is expected to bring a "decision on developing transport and energy ties between the EU and its border territories," he said. "We find it unacceptable that the EU rejects funding natural gas infrastructure, and see gas as an important pillar of energy security at present and in the coming years," he said. Gas from Azerbaijan is a key alternative for Hungary and Moldova too, he said.

Earlier in the day, Szijjártó met Prime Minister Dorin Recean, Economic

Development Minister Dumitru Alaiba, Sergiu Prodan, the minister of culture.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: 'THE SOONER THERE IS PEACE, THE MORE LIVES CAN BE SAVED'

The sooner there is peace, the more lives can be saved, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Tuesday. He said that the "pro-war mainstream" had mounted a heavy attack on the Hungarian prime minister over remarks he delivered at the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha earlier in the day. In his speech, Viktor Orbán called for a ceasefire and peace talks instead of escalating the war in Ukraine. Hungary's viewpoint of the war differs from that of the European mainstream because it is a neighbour of Ukraine, which has a sizeable Hungarian minority, Orbán said in a discussion with Bloomberg editor-in-chief John Micklethwait. Szijjártó, in a post on Facebook, said that "the past several months have proven unfortunately that there will be only losers, no winners of the war next door". "The longer this war drags on, the greater number of losers it is going to have," he added. Szijjártó called saving lives the most important immediate task and urged for help to be provided which he said was impossible without peace. "The sooner there is peace, the more lives can be saved," he said, adding that "the prime minister spoke clearly which is obviously unpleasant for those who support war".

VÁRHELYI, FIDESZ MEPS: PROTECTION OF MINORITY RIGHTS CRUCIAL TO EU ACCESSION

Olivér Várhelyi, the European commissioner for neighbourhood and enlargement, and MEPs of Hungary's ruling Fidesz on Tuesday emphasised the importance of protecting minorities and their rights for accession to the European Union. Addressing a conference on minority rights and EU enlargement in Brussels, Várhelyi noted that the bloc's fundamental principles, including the protection of human rights, was included among the conditions for enlargement. Countries wishing to join the EU need to be helped in fully embracing EU values, and their commitments need to be enshrined into national law, the Hungarian commissioner said. Also, these countries need to remember that respect for EU values is also required once they are fully-fledged EU members, he added. Concerning Ukraine, Várhelyi said the conflict in the country made the situation of the minorities there and in neighbouring countries more difficult. He said the enlargement procedure should help improve the living conditions of minorities. The commissioner added, at the same time, that there were serious problems to be resolved in Ukraine, including in connection with minority education and language use. These problems should be resolved together with the minorities, he said.

Fidesz MEP Kinga Gál said that the experience of the last 20 years showed that the accession procedure helps guarantee the rights of minorities.

She said Ukraine could only join the EU if it respected fundamental human rights and guaranteed equal rights to its minority citizens. But recently approved laws in the country curbing minority rights do not promote this, she added. Gál said the first step in guaranteeing minority and linguistic rights in Ukraine needed to be restoring national minorities' previously acquired rights.

Andrea Bocskor, a Fidesz MEP for Ukraine's Transcarpathia region, said minorities in Ukraine supported launching the country's EU accession procedure. She underlined the importance of resolving the issue of minority rights in the country, because the minority law passed last December did not regard minority communities as equal partners.

NAVRACSICS: GENERATION CHANGE STEERING EUROPE TOWARDS RADICALISATION

In a speech at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Regional Development Minister Tibor Navracsics said a generation change is taking place with the youth using Europe as an "online platform" for communicating their political messages in memes and collating simplified and pointed messages.

This generation change is steering Europe towards polarisation and radicalisation, Navracsics said in his address prior to the general assembly meeting of the Hungarian Atlantic Council. The youth today have grown up integrated entirely into a democratic and uniform Europe and are part of an online revolution, he said. "They see the world and the problems differently, which is the first important factor," the minister said. Radical parties are coming up in Europe while moderate conservatives are either turning radical or they are becoming weaker, he said. "The messages of liberal parties become more and more radical whereas Christian Democrat has become a synonym of being an opposition force," Navracsics said, adding that the situation of the Social Democrats "isn't much better, either". "Because of this, the disputes are becoming sharper," he said. Navracsics said that the Russian-Ukrainian war raised questions concerning Europe's security. The war's message, he said, was that "the myth of Europe's invulnerability has permanently collapsed," adding that it turned out that mankind had not learnt any lessons from history.

Navracsics called a ceasefire key to stopping the war and giving way to talks to be launched as soon as possible in the interest of brokering a just and fair peace. "If this war escalates, it will threaten the future of Europe," the minister said. The future of Europe also depends on how successful the efforts towards turning it into a cultural

community would be. "It is a promise still unfulfilled and explains the internal conflicts within the community; if we understood each other's culture, it would help spare most of our political disputes," Navracsics said.

DEFMIN: HUNGARY SEES CEASEFIRE AS PATH TO ENDING WAR

Hungary sees a ceasefire, rather than weapons deliveries, as the path to ending the war in Ukraine, Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said in Brussels on Tuesday. The minister said in a statement after a meeting with his European Union counterparts that he had made it clear regarding arms deliveries to Ukraine and the issue of increasing the funds of the European Peace Facility that Hungary did not support any measure that would lead to further escalation. "Continuing weapons deliveries clearly leads to an escalation of the situation," the minister said. It is not weapons, but an immediate ceasefire and starting peace talks that will end the war, Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. Hungary supports peace and does not send weapons to Ukraine, he said, adding that the country was helping Ukraine through its largest-ever humanitarian aid programme. Szalay-Bobrovniczky said future support to Ukraine was conditional on the country removing Hungary's OTP Bank from its sanctions list. Meanwhile, he said the war also highlighted the importance of strengthening the capacities of the

European defence industry, which the Hungarian government also supports. "Reviving and strengthening the Hungarian defence industry is a priority for us," the minister said. This will meet the needs of the Hungarian Armed Forces and contribute to Hungary entering international markets as well, he added.

GOVT OFFICIAL: LEFTISTS CONTINUE TO BLOCK TEACHERS' WAGE HIKES

Hungarian leftist parties continue to work against Hungary accessing the European Union funds that would allow teachers' wage hikes, state secretary Bence Rétvári said after a meeting between government officials and opposition lawmakers, representatives of trade unions and student organisations on a draft legislation on teachers' status. Should the EU funds be at hand, teachers' wages could be raised to 561,000 forints (EUR 1,500) on average per month, he added. The government is ready to bring about the largest wage hike of the past 30 years, of 75%, he said. "Unfortunately, we have had no guarantees from leftist politicians that they would stop working against teachers," he said. Wednesday's meeting was the 19th stage of a long series of consultations, Rétvári said. Government officials answered all the questions of the opposition, he added. At the same time, the opposition parties have failed to submit their own texts regarding the legislation; only

the Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) party prepared one, he said. "The others clearly came just to walk out," he said.

At a separate press conference, the six opposition parties rejected the government's proposed changes to teachers' employment status as unacceptable. The representatives of the Socialists, Jobbik-Conservatives, Democratic Coalition, Párbeszéd, LMP and Momentum held a joint press conference after a meeting called by the interior ministry on a draft law with the opposition and representatives of trade unions and student organisations.

Ágnes Kunhalmi of the Socialists, the head of parliament's cultural committee, said they found it unacceptable that the government had made wage hikes conditional on European Union funds. Funding the hikes is the government's responsibility, and should be provided from the budget, he said. Párbeszéd's Tímea Szabó called on the government to scrap the legislation and implement immediate wage hikes. "Revenge legislation can't be the basis of improving public education," she said.

Balázs Barkóczi of the Democratic Coalition warned the legislation would lead to the "utter dismantling of public education." Momentum's Ferenc Gelencsér said Interior Minister Sándor Pintér had "refused to promise that students demonstrating for their future will not be teargassed in the future... and showed no sign of considering to withdraw the legislation."

The representative of the student organisations Adom and United Students' Front said students wanted "a solution, not disorderliness" and suggested that President Katalin Novák should refuse to sign the law." In a statement published after the meeting, the opposition said the legislation went "generally against the interests of Hungarians and the government's agreement with the European Union".

OFFICIAL: GOVT DRAFT TO ENSURE 'STRICT CONDITIONS' FOR GUEST WORKERS

"Foreign workers will be allowed to enter Hungary only under strict conditions, and only as many workers as we need," a state secretary of the economic development ministry said in a debate on the government's draft concerning guest workers in parliament on Wednesday. In his introduction of the bill, Sándor Czomba said the "the proposal is not at all aimed at attracting masses of job seekers to Hungary and take opportunities away from Hungarians." The bill is aimed to "also help retain the Hungarian workforce and create new jobs", Czomba said. The state secretary said the number of job seekers from third countries was "not at all high" and insisted that in proportion to their labour markets, Hungary employed the fewest guest workers in comparison with the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

Czomba said the government was aimed to satisfy an ever growing demand for labour with Hungarian employees through “increasing the economic activity of the population” with special regard to those currently looking for employment, people younger than 25 and older than 65, the “underemployed”, as well as young mothers, adding that those groups could potentially supply 300,000 people to the labour market.

In the current, difficult economic situation a country “cannot afford to pass on investments due to a lack of labour”, Czomba said. Concerning job protection, Czomba said vacant situations would be filled primarily by Hungarians and nationals of EU countries, while job seekers from neighbouring countries, Ukraine and Serbia, would be employed only when no Hungarians had been found. If neither options are possible “only then could job seekers from third countries be employed,” he added. In the interest of protecting the domestic labour market, people from third countries can only be employed in line with certain quotas, the state secretary said. If parliament passes the bill into law, guest workers could stay in Hungary between 90 and 180 days “as long as they are actually employed”, Czomba said, adding that they would be required to have valid travel documents, accommodation, a sufficient amount of money, and that they should meet “public and national security conditions”.

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY ADOPTS POSITION ON WAR

The Budapest assembly on Wednesday passed a position in connection with the war in Ukraine. The proposal, submitted originally by the ruling Fidesz and the Christian Democrats before being amended with changes proposed by the left-wing parties, incorporates the European Council’s statement condemning “Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine”. It was passed with 17 votes in favour, 10 against and one abstention. The original proposal was submitted by Zsolt Wintermantel, Fidesz’s group leader in the city assembly. The version approved on Wednesday included amendments submitted by the group leaders of the Democratic Coalition, the Socialist Party, Momentum and Párbeszéd. Wintermantel told reporters after the vote that the municipal council’s left-wing majority led by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony had rejected his party’s original pro-peace resolution, adding that the amendment proposals had turned the issue into a domestic political battle.

BUDAPEST ASSEMBLY APPROVES HUF 24 BN LOAN FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT COMPANY

The Budapest assembly on Wednesday approved an agreement between Budapest public transport company

BKK and K and H Bank, of a 24 billion forint (EUR 63.9m) loan, as part of the municipality’s “survival programme”. The proposal, submitted by Deputy Mayor Ambruss Kiss, was carried with 17 votes in favour, 2 against and 9 abstentions. The loan will ensure BKK’s operation between June and September, and will have to be paid back by September 18, the proposal said.

HUNGARY GROSS WAGES HUF 577,900 IN MARCH

The average gross wage in Hungary rose by an annual 16.6% to 577,900 forints (EUR 1,539) in March, data released by the Central Statistical Office (KSH) on Wednesday show. Average net wages rose to 398,000 forints with benefits in kind, up 16.5% compared with the same period last year.

For the period January-March, gross wages and net wages without benefits increased by 10.8%, while net wages with benefits were up 10.9% compared with the first quarter of 2022. Calculating with consumer price inflation of 25.2%, real wages were down 6.9 percent, KSH said. The net median wage including benefits was 305,900 forints, up 15.7% compared with the same period last year. Commenting on the data, the Ministry of Economic Development said in a statement that wage growth continued despite the harmful effects of the war and the related sanctions. Compared with 2010, wages have increased more than 2.8-fold, or by

375,400 forints, the ministry said. Though real wages fell in March, the government continues to do everything possible to protect jobs, push “sanctions-fuelled inflation” into the single digits and put real wage growth back on track, the ministry said. It noted that starting next month, supermarkets will be required to offer regular discounts on selected products in a number of categories, and an online price-monitoring platform will be launched in July.

ALMOST 9,500 REFUGEES ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY

Fully 4,927 refugees entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 4,517 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 73 people, ORFK said on Wednesday. Fully 53 refugees, 16 children among them, travelled to Budapest by train.

HUNGARY RECORDS 225 NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS, 3 DEATHS REGISTERED LAST WEEK

Fully 225 new Covid-19 infections were confirmed last week, while three fatalities were registered in connection with the virus, the Coronavirus Press Centre said on Wednesday. The number of active infections stands at 2,549. Currently,

165 coronavirus patients are being treated in hospital, five are on ventilators. Altogether 6,422,390 people have been vaccinated against the coronavirus, with 6,210,852 having received a second jab, 3,905,398 a third, and 425,861 a fourth. The number of registered infections since the start of the pandemic has reached 2,202,716 in Hungary, while there have been 48,868 deaths. Fully 2,151,299 people have made a recovery.

MCC'S BRUSSELS TRAINING CENTRE ORGANISES CONFERENCE ON EU ENERGY POLICY

Mathias Corvinus Collegium's (MCC) training centre in Brussels presented a study on the European Union's energy policy at a debate conference on Tuesday. Authors of the study entitled “Lights out: Is the EU failing on energy policy?” found the EU's energy policy to be incomplete and inadequate to handle the present and future challenges faced by European citizens in the winter in the midst of an energy crisis. James Woudhuysen, visiting professor at London South Bank University, an author of the study, told MTI that the EU's energy policy and decision-making was more “performative” than effective, adding that its decisions had made the bloc's energy situation worse instead of improving it. The EU was unprepared for the energy crisis because it believes that energy policy is synonymous with climate policy and focuses on

zero emissions and reducing energy consumption instead of expanding energy supply, Woudhuysen said. Concerning the EU's aim of weaning itself off Russian fossil fuels, he said the bloc should have thought ahead in 2014, but had not had a plan B when it came to gas supply. Woudhuysen said the EU was still too preoccupied with the “climate apocalypse” and was not focused on medium to long-term measures which could guarantee energy security. He added that the EU should publicly question all its assumptions about energy efficiency, energy conservation, the capabilities of renewable energy sources and the “sanctity” of clean energy.

POPE FRANCIS SENDS LETTER OF THANKS TO HCBC PRESIDENT

Pope Francis has sent a letter of thanks to President of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference (HCBC) András Veres for his Hungary visit in late April.

The letter made available by the HCBC press department on Wednesday shows that the pope thanked the love he said he had experienced during his stay and all the efforts that made his visit possible. He expressed hope that the hard work coupled with pastoral services will “bring fruit abundantly”. He asked Veres to preserve peace and unity and expressed hope that their efforts will contribute to everyone's growth in their faith in Jesus Christ, and the joy of belonging to the church.