

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/NoémiBruzák

King Philippe of Belgium receives the President Katalin Novák

UPCOMING EVENTS

Novák continues Brussels visit

Stats office releases October CPI data

Events linked to wars in Ukraine, Israel

Sebastian Coe receives Sports University honorary doctorate

TOP STORY

GULYÁS: UKRAINE 'HAS NOT MET CONDITIONS'

The European Union should offer Ukraine a privileged partnership for now but accession talks should not be on the table, the head of the prime minister's office has said.

Gergely Gulyás told a government press conference that Hungary stood in solidarity with Ukraine and the country extended significant financial and humanitarian support. "But this doesn't change the fact that Ukraine has failed to fulfil the conditions to start EU accession talks," he added, citing issues concerning national minorities and corruption and referring to decisions that had disadvantaged ethnic Hungarians living in Ukraine. "We must state our agreement with former EU commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker who said that Ukraine's accession would be a big mistake," he said, adding that Juncker believed that "Ukraine is totally corrupt and not ready for EU membership." Gulyás said that Hungary's position concerning EU enlargement had been clear for a long time: ongoing enlargement procedures should be implemented first. Concerning EU support for Ukraine, Gulyás said taking out a joint loan would be unnecessary. Joint borrowing had been agreed on as a "one-off" when the recovery fund was decided on, he added.

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GULYÁS: EU'S STRATEGY ON UKRAINE 'HAS FAILED'

Support for Ukraine must be found in a way that “does not deprive the next European Parliament and European Commission of the opportunity to take meaningful decisions on these issues without resorting to joint borrowing,” Gergely Gulyás the head of the prime minister's office told a government press conference, adding that the EU's strategy on Ukraine had “failed” and a strategic review was needed. A new public survey would be a good way of allowing Hungarian voters to express their views on supporting Ukraine, its EU membership, arms shipments and grain deliveries, he said.

Meanwhile, Gulyás said that inflation in Hungary would be pushed into the single digits by the end of November. The Central Statistical Office will have compiled October's inflation data by Friday afternoon, which is expected to be around 10%, he said. Inflation will fall further in December and is expected to be just over 7% by year-end, he said.

He said a significant increase in Hungary's two standardised minimum wages will be implemented at the start of next year. “Even the most pessimistic calculation indicates an increase above the rate of inflation, and the hikes will cover both the state and the non-state sector,” Gulyás said. “2024 will be the year of wage increases and economic growth,” he said, adding that Hungary's economy was forecast to grow at the fastest pace in the region.

Regarding migration, he said that according to intelligence reports, migrants were becoming increasingly aggressive at the southern border and border patrol officers often faced life-threatening situations. EU politicians' statements on the issue “increasingly point in the direction of common sense”, while the EU was “still trying” to render border protection “impossible legally and physically”, he said. “A prime example is ongoing court proceedings against Hungary because of its effective border protection, and Brussels probably wants to make Hungary pay a daily penalty for stopping migrants at the border,” he said. The government found such attacks “unacceptable”, he said, adding there was a need for change in approach at the level of the EU and between member states, Gulyás added.

Gulyás said a decision was made at the cabinet meeting on Wednesday to tighten the immigration law according to the guiding principle that “Hungary belongs to Hungarians”. The bill would regulate the legal grounds that can be used to qualify for residence and specific period of time allowed, with a complete ban on extensions. It also allows for immediate deportation should migrants break “the basic rules of community coexistence or the law”, he said.

These rules would also apply to foreign guest workers, who, otherwise, would only get a job in Hungary if no Hungarian employee was available to take it, he said. Gulyás said the rules would be worked out in such a way as to render it impossible for there to be

a greater number of guest workers in Hungary than vacant positions.

Meanwhile, he said the government plans to submit a bill to parliament on digital citizenship next week. The scheme is designed to allow citizens to conduct their businesses, show IDs and provide e-signatures using their mobile phones, Gulyás said. Later on, the scheme will cover the payment of public utility bills, he added. Gulyás said it was imperative for Hungary “to take a huge leap forward in digitalisation” in the interest of making its economy competitive in the medium to long term and simplifying the conduct of business and streamlining the state bureaucracy.

Answering a question, Gulyás said the government had information that a large part of funds from cybercrime, some 20 billion forints, had been channelled to Ukraine. The interior ministry will brief the public on its investigation, he added.

Meanwhile, referring to an appeal by civil rights group TASZ concerning the police banning pro-Palestinian demonstration, Gulyás said: “The government has made it clear that there will be no demonstration in support of terrorists.” “Our view is that there are extremist opinions whose expression can be restricted, but we await the court ruling,” he added.

Concerning the recent sacking of the director of the National Museum over “artwork promoting homosexuality”, Gulyás said leaders “must be able to interpret the law and make decisions accordingly”. He said the government

was keeping an eye on the enforcement of the child protection law, adding that sex education was primarily a parental task and “the involvement of civil organisations is not needed”.

Asked about Hungary’s support for Sweden’s NATO accession, Gulyas said parliament would make a decision once a two-thirds majority had emerged backing ratification. “For the time being, we don’t see this would be especially important to the Swedish government, and as long as it is unimportant to the Swedes, it need not be important to us, either,” he added.

Asked about reports that ruling Fidesz party’s popularity had dropped in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, in connection with a battery plant to be built near the city -- and would the government consider changing its position on the planned construction -- he said polls should be treated “with restraint”. “If we want green energy, then we must take care of storing it,” he said, adding that today’s batteries were incomparable to the batteries of fifty years ago. “There has been consent in Hungary on taking steps towards green energy, and we expect the authorities to enforce the strictest environmental regulations.”

Asked about Fidesz’s candidate for the mayor of Budapest, he said several possible contenders had proven their skills in recent years, and he mentioned Zsolt Láng, Balázs Fürjes and Zsolt Wintermantel as potential candidates.

Meanwhile, Gulyás said that freezing Hungary’s EU funding was “unfair from the point of competitiveness”, adding,

however, that economic forecasts for next year indicated that the fastest economic growth in the region would be in Hungary, even without the arrival of EU support. “It would be important for Hungary to receive the resources it is entitled to, but these represent only 1-2% of GDP, and the country can function without them,” he said.

Gulyás also said a bill on Hungary’s sovereignty will be submitted to parliament next week, he said. Among its duties, a “sovereignty authority” to be established under the new law will be entitled to investigate political parties that receive foreign support, he added. In line with regulations to be submitted to parliament on Tuesday, the acceptance of foreign support by parties will be a criminal act, he said,

Commenting on Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s remarks at the Turkic Council concerning the Azerbaijani occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh, he said Azeri President Ilham Aliyev played a stabilising role in the region. Western state leaders frequently visit Astana, he said, and Orban’s congratulation was “not connected to an assessment of the Azeri-Armenian conflict”, he added. “Armenia’s territorial integrity is an important value, and we are loyal to Armenians,” he said. “We are also launching aid programmes in Armenia,” Gulyas added.

NOVÁK: SECURITY KEY FOR HUNGARY

Security is crucial for Hungary and its people, President Katalin Novák said after talks with NATO chief Jens

Stoltenberg in Brussels. Hungary’s NATO membership ensures security “both for the country and its region”, Novák told reporters. “Peace and stability are of paramount importance for Hungary,” she said. Hungary contributes to NATO’s missions and will soon meet its commitment to raising its defence spending to 2% of GDP, Novák said. The presence of Hungarian troops in the Western Balkans contributes to peace and stability in the region, she added.

Meanwhile, Novák said Hungary supported Ukraine’s right to self-defence and would continue to provide humanitarian aid to that country. Hungary condemns Russia’s aggression against a sovereign Ukraine, she added. “The most important task is to find paths to peace,” the president said, calling for a ceasefire and peace talks. Novák also ruled out the possibility of any ties between Hungary and Russia “which could undermine [Hungary’s] ties with its allies and commitments within NATO as well as in the European Union”.

Concerning the Middle East, Novák said Hungary deeply sympathised with Israel and condemned the “brutal attack” it had suffered. The conflict, she said, focused international attention on the importance of stability in the region. Answering a question about Sweden’s NATO accession, Novák said it would “contribute to reinforcing NATO and increasing common security”.

The president also noted the importance of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, saying it was



“highly important to honour minority rights especially when a country has ambitions to join our alliances”. Resolution of issues around the Hungarian community in Ukraine “is necessary for Hungary to maintain its supportive stance towards Ukraine’s battles”, she said.

NOVÁK: HUNGARY PREPARING FOR EU PRESIDENCY

Hungary is making preparations for the rotating presidency of the European Union Council to be held in the second half of 2024, President Katalin Novák said after talks in Brussels with President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola. Novák said on Facebook: “I trust that we will have another successful Hungarians presidency in 2024”. Metsola confirmed that she expected the same, Novák added.

Novák also met King Philippe of Belgium in Brussels to discuss “historical and diplomatic ties” between the two countries. Novák said on social media platform X that it had been an honour for her to meet the Belgian ruler. They discussed the European Union Spanish, Belgian, and Hungarian presidencies, she added. Novák presented Philippe with an original menu from the 1880 engagement dinner of Rudolph, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and Princess Stephanie of Belgium.

Meanwhile, at an earlier meeting with Hungarian MEPs, Novák said:

“There are situations in which it is worth setting aside political differences in the interest of a common cause.” Speaking in the Liszt Institute in Brussels, she offered partnership to all Hungarian MEPs. “When it comes to important Hungarian interests, we need to seek an opportunity for joint action to promote those interests.” “A crucial cause now is Hungary’s access to the EU funds it is legitimately entitled to,” Novák said.

The MEPs of the ruling Fidesz-Christian Democrat alliance, opposition Social Democrat István Ujhelyi, and MEPs of Romania’s ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party attended the meeting held behind closed doors.

Meanwhile, addressing an event on demographic issues organised by the Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations and the Liszt Institute, the president said Hungary regarded real freedom of choice for families as among the most important fundamental principles, and the Hungarian state strove to give families freedom of choice. She said everything possible needed to be done to close the fertility gap and help couples have as many children as they want.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: UKRAINE’S EU ACCESSION WOULD BRING WAR TO BLOC

Ukraine will be unfit for European Union membership until peace can be established in the country, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said, arguing that Ukraine’s EU accession

“would bring the war to the bloc...” Commenting on the European Commission’s new enlargement package, Szijjártó said the analysis was correct in concluding that Ukraine had not met the conditions for EU candidate status, pointing out its violations of national minority rights. “Since even the European Commission says that Ukraine has failed to meet the conditions for candidate status, we don’t consider any additional steps to be timely when it comes to accession talks with Ukraine,” the minister said before leaving for Guatemala. At the same time, the Hungarian government believes it is time for a debate on the EU’s future policy on Ukraine, he added.

With the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is clear that neither media freedom nor the freedom of speech apply in the country, and elections are not being held, either, Szijjártó said. “It would obviously be absurd for European Union institutions or member states to take a stance on how the institutions of the rule of law function in Ukraine under these circumstances,” he added.

Enlargement, he said, should serve the expansion of peace, rather than bringing war into the bloc. “So we don’t consider any progress in Ukraine’s accession talks to be timely at the moment,” he said. “And we, Hungarians, of course, still expect Ukraine to restore the rights held by the Transcarpathian Hungarian community until 2015.”

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said the EU faced serious security and economic challenges and was getting weaker.

One way to make the bloc stronger, he said, would be to admit more members, adding that the EU should “start with the Western Balkans”. “This is a process that has gone unfinished for twenty years,” Szijjártó said. The Western Balkan countries clearly have a place in the EU, he said, adding that their accession would bring new momentum and energy to the bloc. He singled out Serbia as a key country in the region, noting that the EC had “correctly determined” that it had made significant progress on the path to EU integration. Szijjártó said new accession chapters should be opened with Serbia as soon as possible so that the process could be concluded as quickly as possible. The minister welcomed the EC’s decision to grant candidate status to Georgia, which he said it should have received “a lot sooner”.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY, GUATEMALA TOGETHER STAND FOR CHRISTIAN VALUES

Hungary and Guatemala together stand for Christian values, traditional family model in international politics, even if this goes against the liberal mainstream, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, Peter Szijjártó, said in Guatemala City. His visit, he said, was an event of diplomatic history as high-level visits had never taken place between the two countries hitherto. He said Hungary was determined to pursue international

relations based on connectivity and cultured, civilised cooperation, and wanted links between Hungary and Guatemala, too, to follow the same direction. Considering the great distance between the two countries, the securest basis for cooperation was interpersonal relations, he said, and an agreement enabling twenty students from Guatemala to study in Hungarian universities with a scholarship each year was in the pipeline, he added. Economic cooperation, he said, was increasingly active, with the annual value of trade doubling last year, reaching a record 7 million dollars, while growth in trade so far this year has been 19%.

“The first Hungarian companies have arrived in the Guatemala market in the areas of health care, the food industry, and IT,” he said.

AZBEJ: HUNGARY DONATES EUR 100,000 FOR GAZA REFUGEES

Hungary is donating 100,000 euros for the humanitarian care of civilians fleeing Gaza, a government official said on Thursday. After attending the Paris conference convened by President Emmanuel Macron for raising aid for the civilian population of Gaza, Tristan Azbej, the state secretary for aiding persecuted Christians, said on Facebook that Hungary’s contribution would support Egyptian aid efforts in Gaza. Azbej said Hungary strongly condemned the Hamas terrorist organisation’s attacks against the population of Israel and recognised

Israel’s right to self-defence against terrorism. He called for the hostages taken by Hamas to be released immediately. Also, he said exhaustive efforts were needed to evacuate foreigners, including Hungarians, from Gaza.

Further, the war must not be allowed to escalate into an inter-state conflict, he added.

DEFMIN: TÜRKIYE, HUNGARY ‘STRATEGIC PARTNERS’

Türkiye is a strategic partner of primary importance for Hungary, with long-established defence and military ties, the defence minister said after talks with his Turkish counterpart, Yasar Güler, in Budapest. Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said the talks focused on defence and security cooperation. Türkiye is a member of the NATO command deployed to Hungary, and is currently participating in Adaptive Hussars 23, the largest international military exercise of the past 30 years, he added. Szalay-Bobrovniczky said Türkiye was “an extremely important player” in regional security policy, and “its counsel is indispensable regarding the conflicts threatening our security”. A NATO member and a “leading nation in the region”, Türkiye’s stance on the war in Ukraine was similar to that of Hungary, he said. Both countries are committed to promoting an immediate ceasefire and peace talks, and to avoiding escalation and further sacrifice, he said. Hungary and the region has a vital interest in peace and

strengthening economic and trade ties, he added. Hungary and Türkiye also agree that NATO, the largest defence alliance in the world, should prioritise the monitoring of terror threats, he said. Hungary also has an interest in preserving stability in Africa, Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. As part of a complex aid package, it is deploying a military mission to Chad next spring, with an aim of solving problems locally rather than importing them into Europe, he added. The ministers also agreed on the importance of stability in the Western Balkans, a region where both countries deploy troops to NATO operations. Regarding the defence industry, Szalay-Bobrovniczky briefed Güler on the modernisation of Hungary's Armed Forces, including equipping the entire army with NATO compatible equipment as well as an expansion of the defence industry to ensure supplies and contribute to the country's economic growth, he said. It was recently announced that Gidran armed vehicles will soon be manufactured in Hungary, he noted. One of the most important vehicles of the Hungarian Armed Forces will be manufactured with a Turkish licence, further strengthening bilateral ties, he added.

Güler called talks "honest and constructive". Türkiye sees its cooperation with Hungary, "a friendly and brotherly ally", as especially important, he said.

He said he and Szalay-Bobrovniczky had reviewed the two countries' bilateral ties, security issues in the

Euro-Atlantic region as well as issues regarding their NATO membership. They also expressed their commitment to strengthening cooperation in the defence industry and other sectors. He praised "the development of ... Hungary and its Armed Forces", and invited his Hungarian counterpart to a visit in Türkiye.

PARLIAMENT DEBATES BILL ON MONEY LAUNDERING, FIGHT AGAINST FINANCING TERRORISM

Parliament debated a bill on money laundering and the prevention of the financing of terrorism on Thursday. János Fónagy, state secretary of the ministry of economic development, said that the government was determined to whiten the economy, take action against money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The current proposals also aim to make regulations more precise and customer-friendly, based on the experiences of market players, he added. Gyula Szeberényi of ruling Fidesz said that the proposals also aimed to bring Hungary closer to meeting international norms. Gergely Arató of opposition DK called the proposals on money laundering a "joke". Had the government indeed wanted to act against money laundering, they "should have named the owners of several castles, helicopters and yachts" and place some of them under criminal

procedure, he insisted. "Oligarchs close to Fidesz", with government support, "are hiding many billions of forints" in private capital funds, "which is the real area of money laundering for Fidesz billionaires," he said.

PARLT COMMITTEE HEAD HAS TALKS IN ITALY

"Europe should be led by able governments rather than NGOs," Judit Varga, the head of the Hungarian parliament's European affairs committee, concluded after talks in Italy. The talks with MP Alessandro Giglio Vigna, deputy of the League party, senate member Giuliomaria Terzi di Sant'Agata and other representatives, focused mainly on illegal migration and its impacts. Varga and her negotiating partners were in agreement that illegal migration was in close connection with terrorism, public safety problems in Europe and a re-emergence of anti-Semitism. Varga insisted that "politicians that earlier supported migration are now starting to realise that Europe's migration policy has been ill-advised." She said she agreed with the Italian politicians she had met that "migration must be stemmed, the external borders protected, and Europe should only be entered legally."

Concerning Hungary's upcoming EU presidency, Varga said reversing negative demographic trends would be high on the agenda as a crucial factor for Europe's competitiveness. She noted the Italian government's

support for families “over promoting illegal migration”. She quoted Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni as saying that “mandatory migrant distribution quotas would not resolve the problems arising from migration”.

NAVRACSICS: HUNGARY USING EU FUNDS EFFECTIVELY

Hungary is among the member states to have used European Union funding the most effectively, Regional Development Minister Tibor Navracsics said on Thursday. Speaking at the closing event of two comprehensive regional development programmes, TOP and VEKOP, Navracsics said that the two schemes supported 13,000 projects aimed at closing the gap between developed and laggard regions of the country. Navracsics thanked the European Commission for the timely disbursement of the funds, and saying it had contributed to “Hungary becoming more liveable and competitive”.

He called on representatives of the EC to “move on from their political fears and decide on funding based on their professional stance rather than the European Parliament’s political statements.” Agnes Monfret, head of the European Commission’s unit for programme implementation in Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovenia, noted that TOP and VEKOP projects had created or revamped some creches offering 10,000 places and 50,000 places in kindergartens. The

programmes also contributed to building 3,700 hectares of industrial parks in less-developed localities, to upgrading 3.3 million square meters of public spaces, to building 500km of bike roads and to revamping 2,000 GP’s offices. Almost 65,000 people participated in training for the labour market, and 99 local groups received help in implementing their development strategy, she noted. Hungary’s cohesion funds in the 2021-2027 financial cycle come to 22 billion euros, or 12% of the country’s GDP, she said. “I count on my Hungarian colleagues to work together with us ... and to communicate our joint achievements as partners.” TOP used 4 billion euros of EU co-financing in disadvantaged regions of the country, and VEKOP received 582 million euros to develop projects in central Hungary.

ECON DEVELOPMENT MINISTER: GROWING WAGES TO BOOST ECONOMIC REBOUND

Thanks to effective government measures, inflation will fall into single digits by year-end and to 5-6% in 2024, the economic development minister told VKF, a forum of employers, unions and the government. Economic growth is estimated to be around zero percent this year, and is expected to return to 4% or more next year, the ministry cited Márton Nagy as saying. The purchasing power of wages is estimated to have grown in the second part of the year, and will probably

return to a 4-5% growth rate in coming years, he said. To boost that trend, the government is backing VKF’s majority stance that minimum wages should grow by 15% as early as December. The minimum wage of degree holders should grow by 10%, he added. A new multi-year wage agreement could be drafted in early 2024, he said.

BUDGET DEFICIT HUF 3,487.6 BN IN OCT

Hungary’s cash-flow-based budget, excluding local councils, had a 3,487.6 billion forint (EUR 9.2bn) deficit at the end of October, the finance ministry said in a preliminary release of data. The central budget deficit reached 3,509.7 billion forints and the social security funds were 142.3 billion in the red, the ministry said. Separate state funds had a surplus of 164.4 billion forints. Household energy subsidies cost the treasury 1,301.4 billion forints by the end of October, compared with 165 billion in the same period last year, it noted.

Government spending related to programmes financed by the European Union came to 2,151.2 billion in Jan-Oct, while EU transfers were worth 1,191.5 billion. Spending on pensions reached 4,724.3 billion forints and on health care 1,893.1 billion forints by the end of October.

Expenditures on compensation for suburban and long-distance public transport reached 576 billion forints, 88.4 billion more than in the first ten months of 2022. The

full-year deficit target is 3,400.2 billion forints. The deficit reached 4,753.4 billion forints in 2022. The ministry said the unfavourable global economic environment and the energy crisis caused by the protracted war in Ukraine and Brussels's sanctions policies had resulted in extraordinary expenditures, adding, however, that the budget would guarantee the preservation of the value of pensions, the continuation of family subsidies and the caps on household utility bills.

STATE SECY CALLS FOR BOOSTING MEMBER STATES' COMPETENCIES

A government official called for more room for manoeuvre for EU member states on economic reforms, after attending a meeting of the EU's Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) in Brussels. Tibor Tóth, the state secretary for macro-economy and international affairs, said on the sidelines of the meeting that they had discussed a proposed reform of the EU economic governance framework. The proposal, a priority of the Spanish presidency, "has made significant progress, also thanks to Hungary's proposals", he said. Hungary proposed three amendments, Tóth said. "It is important that a classification should be decided on the basis of objective indices rather than subjective bilateral meetings and evaluations of the European Commission," he said.

Hungary also proposed allowing member states more room for manoeuvre in the reform procedure. "It seems the Spanish presidency's stance is shifting closer to ours." The third proposal was for defence spending to not be included in the debt curve defined under the Maastricht criteria. That proposal is expected to be included in the economic reform package, he said. While Hungary supported the reform package, many details will have to be cleared up before it can be finalised, he said.

GOVT TO OFFER GRANTS TO BUILD CORPORATE ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

The government is launching a tender in January aimed at helping companies build industrial energy storage systems, the state secretary for energy told a forum in Komárom, in northern Hungary, on Thursday. The scheme's budget of 62 billion forints (EUR 164m) will be disbursed to winning bidders, helping to boost the country's total storage capacity of 20 megawatts to 400 megawatts by mid-2026, Gábor Czepek said. It is crucial for Hungary to be able to store large quantities of green energy as soon as possible, he said, adding that the country's energy sovereignty, built on green and nuclear energies, was scheduled to be secured by 2030. Meanwhile, the lifecycle of the existing blocks of the Paks nuclear power plant can be extended until 2057, he said, but the project to add

new blocks must be completed by early 2030s, "with the current investor and current investment environment".

VIRULENT BIRD FLU STRAIN DETECTED IN NE HUNGARY

The highly pathogenic avian influenza virus has been detected in samples from a duck farm in Tiszadob, in north-eastern Hungary, the national food safety authority (Nébih) said on Wednesday. Under instructions from the authority, some 51,000 birds at the farm will be culled, while a protective zone within a 3km radius around the farm has been established. Animals within a 10 km radius of the farm will be observed, Nébih said. The authority has also launched an investigation as to the origin of the H5N1 virus detected on the farm. It noted that the low pathogenic H5N2 virus had earlier been detected in southern Hungary.

MORE THAN 8,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 4,326 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 3,856 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 46 people, ORFK said on Thursday.