

PHOTO OF THE DAY



UVSE winners jump into the pool with head coach Márton Beniczur in BENU women's water polo Hungarian Cup final

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels

Stats office releases report on construction, industry output for Sept

Events linked to wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

UKRAINE MUST WAIT FOR EU ACCESSION TALKS

Hungary opposes the European Commission's proposal to start accession talks with Ukraine, a Fidesz official has said.

"Even starting accession talks with Ukraine, a country at war, would be unacceptable as it would present a security risk for the whole of Europe," István Hollik, the communications director of the ruling party said in a video statement. "In addition, the accession of Ukraine would put such a huge financial burden on the EU that its ailing economy could not bear." Hungary's ruling parties suggest that the country should continue to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but they oppose the start of accession talks, he said. Hollik slammed the leftist opposition for supporting Ukraine's accession bid, adding that they "are promoting the position that Brussels expects them to promote". He said this would result in "serious political debates, though Hungarian voters will make the decision [by responding to] the National Consultation survey," he added, encouraging the public to participate. "Don't let Brussels make decisions for us over issues of paramount importance," he said.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY SEEKING ENERGY COOPERATION WITH VENEZUELA

Hungary wants to make use of the possibility of energy cooperation with Venezuela and is exploring ways to import liquefied natural gas from and export oil extraction technologies to the Latin American country, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Caracas. Hungary wants as few sanctions as possible to be imposed worldwide in the future, Szijjártó told a press conference held together with his Venezuelan counterpart, Yvan Gil, arguing that sanctions were mostly ineffective but caused much damage and suffering for “everyday people who are not to blame for anything”. “We want global cooperation and connectivity instead of sanctions,” Szijjártó said. “That’s why we’re glad that the United States has eased its sanctions on Venezuela.” “We now urge the European Union to follow the example of the US and relax its own sanctions [on the country],” he said, noting that the EU has cut the time between reviews of its sanctions from one year to six months. Hungary has maintained diplomatic ties with Venezuela for over half a century, and the Hungarian community in the country is the third largest in Latin America, the foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as saying. Hungary wants to take advantage of this, as well as Venezuela’s policy of opening

to the rest of the world, and give new momentum to cooperation between the two countries, the minister said.

“We want to take advantage of the fact that Venezuela is now opening the door to energy cooperation,” Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary was exploring the possibility of importing LNG from the country. “We’ve entered into talks on the use of Hungarian oil extraction technologies in Venezuela,” he announced.

Szijjártó also said Hungary will offer scholarships to 25 Venezuelan university students each year starting in 2024. In addition, the two countries will elevate their diplomatic ties to an ambassadorial level and the honorary consul in Caracas will be promoted to honorary consul general, he said.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó lamented that the world was dominated by increasingly severe conflicts and that international politics was mainly about “lecturing each other, disputes and sanctions”. “We would like it if global politics finally returned to the basis of mutual respect,” he said. As regards the war in Ukraine, Szijjártó noted that Hungary wanted peace as soon as possible, as only peace could “put an end to the suffering ... save lives and end the destruction”. “This war has severely weakened Europe, and we don’t want Europe to become even weaker,” he said. “And ... we thank Venezuela for regularly underlining the importance of peace at international forums.”

ROGÁN: DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP TO BRING ABOUT ‘REVOLUTIONARY’ CHANGE

A new scheme dubbed Digital Citizenship (DAP) will bring about an unprecedented transformation for Hungarian citizens in digital data handling at the end of next year, the head of the Prime Minister’s Cabinet Office has said. Antal Rogán told journalists that in the initial phase the programme will enable personal identification, electronic signature and conducting a part of personal business for citizens by using their mobile phones. The DAP will later ensure them a safe digital access and use of state and market services and the payment of public utility bills. A trial period for the app will start in April with the involvement of several tens of thousands of users and launched for citizens across the board in September. From this time, the DAP can be used for full identification if requested by police, submitting applications to authorities for certificates or conducting the most common personal businesses, Rogán said. The circle of digitally accessible services will be significantly expanded in 2025 and, in a consecutive phase, in 2026, he said. The DAP is a cloud-based application and optional for citizens, said Rogán, adding that the older, conventional methods for using services will also remain in place.

The scheme has been developed in line with the EU’s new Electronic

Identification, Authentication and Trust Services (eIDAS) regulatory framework, he said. The government released the draft of the DAP for a public debate on Friday and will submit a related bill to parliament next week. In connection with the DAP, the government will also submit a constitutional amendment proposal regulating the handling of personal digital data by the state.

**GOVT OFFICIAL:
HUNGARY, ITALY MULLING
COOPERATION TO AID
PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS**

The most effective and humanitarian course of action in crisis regions is to give people an opportunity to stay in their homeland or return there, the state secretary for aiding persecuted Christians told a conference in Vatican City, where he presented achievements of the Hungary Helps programme and met Italian officials. On the sidelines of the conference, Tristan Azbej met Davide Dionisi, the Italian special envoy for the protection of religious freedom, and highlighted the commitment of Italy and Hungary to ensuring religious freedom. "The world often fails to see that Christians are the largest group among those persecuted for their faith," Azbej said. Hungary and Italy are mulling cooperation to explore possibilities to represent the issue jointly, as well as the most effective way to help persecuted communities in Africa, the Middle

East and other places through humanitarian and development programmes, he said.

Since its inception in 2016, the Hungary Helps programme has helped some 1.5 million people through 300 programmes in 50 countries of the world, Azbej, who also heads the scheme, said. Some 300 million people are suffering persecution for their Christian faith worldwide, he said. One in five Christians is persecuted in Africa. Fully 89% of the Christians killed for their faith last year, 5,000 people, were killed in Nigeria, he added.

Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu of Nigeria, the secretary of the Section of First Evangelization of the Dicastery for Evangelization, thanked Hungary for aiding Christians worldwide. Hungary is contributing to the improvement of ties between Africa and the West, he said.

**VARGA: 'CHANGE IN
BRUSSELS ESSENTIAL'**

Change in Brussels "is essential", Judit Varga, the (Fidesz) head of parliament's European affairs committee, said on Facebook. Varga said Brussels was forcing anyone who "speaks the truth about migration" into silence. "We stand up for our Polish friends. Coerced migration imperils the security of Europeans," she added. Referring to the suspension of the immunity of four Polish MEPs on the government side, Varga branded the move made at the November EP plenary session

"bureaucratic terrorism". She said Polish politicians had been blamed for committing a hate crime by sharing an election campaign film on social media that warned of the dangers of illegal migration. Varga said the EP had "gravely violated" immunity rules and its action was "political", thereby damaging "the most basic principles of democracy and the rule of law".

**MINISTRY: TALKS
ONGOING ON NEXT YEAR'S
PAY HIKE FOR NURSES**

Talks are ongoing on the details of the next pay rise nurses are scheduled to receive in the spring of 2024, the interior ministry said. Health-care professionals will receive another wage hike next March, on top of the 18% pay rise they received back in July. This second phase of wage hikes will bring the average base salary of health-care professionals to at least 37% of the average base salary of doctors, the ministry said. Péter Takács, the state secretary for health care, is in talks with representatives of the Democratic Union of Hungarian Social and Health Care Workers (MSZ EDDSZ) and the Independent Trade Union of Ambulance Workers (MOSZ), they said, adding that the government will also seek the opinions of the unions when devising the details of the regulations. The ministry said it urges the introduction of salary bands over the current pay scale of fixed salaries based on professional advancement. The 2023 central budget has allocated 50 billion forints (EUR 131.9m) for wage hikes in the health-care sector.



MI HAZÁNK CALLS FOR DISPATCHING MILITARY TO BORDER, BORDER GENDARMERIE

László Toroczkai, leader of the opposition Mi Hazánk party, has called for the military to be dispatched to “rein in people-smuggling gangs at the Hungary-Serbia border” and for a special border gendarmerie to be introduced. Speaking at a demonstration held at Ásotthalom, in which supporters of his party blocked a lane on the road to the local border-crossing station, Toroczkai said the army should be called in immediately to take action against armed gangs. He said such a measure could be facilitated by Hungary’s emergency measures, and noted that the army had been dispatched in 2015 “when as yet there were no people smugglers with guns”. Toroczkai demanded a “real border seal”, adding that border control would require dedicated military border guards “able to protect the border fence”, especially in the Ásotthalom-Mórahalom-Röszke area, “the main migration route”, he said.

Toroczkai also said the government should make rules more stringent and “treat as criminals those that damage the fence and cross into Hungary rather than escorting them back to the border, allowing them to try again within a few hours”.

DONÁTH: DK ‘ENTANGLING OPPOSITION IN CULTURE OF LIES’

The opposition “must adopt a culture of truth”, Momentum MEP Anna Donáth said in a speech on Sunday, accusing fellow opposition party, the Democratic Coalition (DK), of entangling the opposition in “a culture of lies”. In her speech streamed on Momentum’s Facebook page, Donáth said Momentum’s goal was to stand a joint opposition candidate against the Fidesz candidate in the 2024 local council elections in every municipality and district of Budapest. She said Momentum had always been open to cooperating locally. Candidates who are credible to locals and have a chance of winning against Fidesz should be selected. They should also abide by a “culture of truth”, she said. If agreement cannot be reached on a joint candidate in a given locality, then a primary should be held, she added. Donáth said the outcome of the EP election would be good yardstick to judge which parties enjoyed real support.

“We must show that Momentum is the party that voters can have confidence in, that it won’t treat them as stupid; it will speak the truth and take responsibility for its actions. [Momentum] will, in other words, represent a culture of truth,” she said. “We don’t want to dismantle opposition cooperation but to renew it,” she added.

She said the opposition had lacked credibility in the 2022 general election as voters did not believe the opposition would govern differently: they were accustomed “to politicians lying”, she insisted. One reason why was down to the ruling Fidesz party itself, “which has spent huge amounts of money smearing the opposition ... and the other is DK and its leader”, she said. Viktor Orbán, she said, had performed badly in the global economic environment and the prime minister had “knowingly lied” to voters about the real state of the economy. “How credible is the opposition’s criticism of him if the same sentences can literally be said of DK’s leader?” DK had “countless opportunities” to take responsibility for their past in government but they still campaigned “with lies and pretend to be infallible”. “This culture of lies has kept Fidesz in power for 13 years...” Donáth said. To change the government, “we must replace the opposition”, she said.

DK: ‘DANGEROUS’ BATTERY PLANT BEING BUILT IN C HUNGARY

A new “dangerous” battery plant is being built south of Budapest, an opposition Democratic Coalition politician said. DK wants the building of all battery plants to be suspended immediately and existing plants to be inspected by independent experts to assess risks and occupational safety, Olivio Kocsis-Cake, DK’s shadow environment minister, told an online

press briefing. Referring to the new plant in Iváncsa, he said such plants were popping up “overnight” all over the country. Further, the plant will also house a battery testing facility whose purpose is to put batteries under multiple kinds of physical duress, thereby exposing the environment to contamination. He said local residents must be told of the dangers of plants under construction and their approval sought.

NOVÁK MARKS PANNONHALMA BASILICA’S 800TH ANNIVERSARY

President Katalin Novák on Saturday opened the memorial year marking the 800th anniversary of the inauguration of the basilica at the Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma, in western Hungary. The president referred to Pannonhalma Abbey as “Europe’s Christian fortress ... whose monks have followed the instructions of (King) Saint Stephen to pray for the survival of the country at all times.” Members of the Benedictine order “develop and heal the environment rather than poison

it; they strive for harmony rather than chaos, seek order rather than disorder, they educate rather than corrupt,” she said.

Education at the abbey’s secondary school is “an inspiration for all schools in Hungary”, she said. “Pannonhalma has been the cradle of Hungarian education, in which knowledge and faith are inseparable ... At Pannonhalma competitiveness and moral education go together; they reinforce rather than weaken each other.” Novák noted that the abbey was founded over a millennium ago, while its school 200 years. Ahead of the opening ceremony of the memorial year, mass was celebrated by Michael Wallace Banach, apostolic nuncio to Hungary.

HUNGARY ‘DOING WELL’ IN MEETING ITS SPACE STRATEGY GOALS

Hungary is “doing well” in meeting its goals set down in its space strategy, a government official has said. A country as small as Hungary must find “breakout points” for entering the global space market, Orsolya Ferencz, the foreign ministry’s

commissioner for space science, said, discussing space research with Tibor Navracsics, the regional development minister, at a civic roundtable in Tapolca, in western Hungary, on Friday evening. China, India, the Gulf states, Türkiye, Israel, South American and Far East countries have entered global space research, and Europe is making strenuous efforts to stay at the top, she said, adding that the space industry was likely to generate direct revenue of around 1,000 billion dollars in 2030-2040. While Czechia has 300 space industry companies, Hungary has a mere 40, she noted. Navracsics noted that Hungary’s space strategy was adopted in 2021 after two years of consultations, and he asked about Hungary’s chances in the global space race. Ferencz said: “It’s the right moment for us, the moment when everybody is at the starting line setting up companies and launching services. It is capability rather than size or population that matters,” she said, adding that Hungary’s first space strategy was designed to cover a ten-year period, and its first detailed review is set for next year.