

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTVI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Zoltán Fischer

PM Orbán at the meeting of the Centrist Democrat International in Brussels

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU affairs ministers meet in Brussels

Events linked to wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

PAKS EXPANSION IN CONSTRUCTION PHASE

The construction phase of the Paks nuclear power plant is under way, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign affairs and trade minister, said on Tuesday at the signing of the construction timetable for the upcoming years.

In the 2030s the new blocks can start producing electricity, he told a joint press conference held with Alexei Likhachev, head of Russian nuclear energy company Rosatom, hailing construction of the new reactors. "We will be able to connect the new nuclear power plant to the grid at the start of the next decade," Szijjártó said. Paks is now the largest nuclear project in Europe with a construction permit, he noted. Thanks to the investment, Hungary will remain among twenty countries in the world whose economies grow while they reduce harmful emissions, he said, explaining that the new blocks will mean avoiding the emission of 17 million tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. Rosatom said in a statement that Russia has begun work on equipment for the upgrade project that takes longer to manufacture. Some 800-900 people are expected to be working at the construction site by the end of the year, and around 2,000 by the end of 2024. Around 10,000-13,000 people will be working at the site at the peak of the construction phase, the statement said.

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DEFMIN: HUNGARY DOESN'T SUPPORT FURTHER FUNDING FOR UKRAINE

Hungary continues to reject delivering weapons to Ukraine, and doesn't support further financial support either, the defence minister said in Brussels on Tuesday. In a statement on the sidelines of a meeting of EU defence ministers, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky lamented that member states had not changed their stance on the issue, and continue to discuss weapons deliveries to Ukraine. Hungary is committed to promoting an immediate ceasefire and peace talks, he said. The Hungarian government does not support Ukraine's continued funding "as they could barely be convinced to remove one of the largest Hungarian banks from their blacklist."

The ministers also discussed the situation in the Sahel, an issue with a direct bearing on Hungary's security, he said. Parliament adopted a package of aid last week, which includes military aid in the region, he said. Another important region is the Western Balkans, one of the most important routes of migration into Europe, he said. Its stability is also directly connected to that of Hungary, he added. Szalay-Bobrovniczky also hailed that Hungary has been tapped to take over command of the EU's military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a "great step forward".

"Peace requires strength. We will continue to work," he said.

DEFMIN: ADAPTIVE HUSSARS 23 EXERCISE INVOLVES ENTIRETY OF ARMED FORCES

The Adaptive Hussars 23 international military exercise involves the entirety of the Hungarian Armed Forces, Defence Minister Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said in Hajdúhadház on Monday. The military exercise is the largest in Hungary in the last 30 years, Szalay-Bobrovniczky told a press conference before inspecting the exercise, calling it a test for the Hungarian Armed Forces, cooperation with allies and Hungarian public administration. "This test is going very well so far, but we, of course, have to wait till the end before drawing the final conclusions," the minister said. The objective of the exercise is to test the military's readiness for and response to an imagined situation threatening Hungary's security, the minister said. It also tests the capabilities of civilian public administration when it comes to troop movements and logistics, he added. Szalay-Bobrovniczky emphasised the importance of testing the ability to cooperate with allies, noting that several NATO forces were also taking part in the exercise. He noted that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had also inspected certain elements of the exercise on Monday, namely a bridge-building exercise at Tiszaroff and a jump exercise of

Italian and Hungarian paratroopers in Nyíregyháza. Adaptive Hussars 23 involves around 5,000 Hungarian troops, including 500 reservists, he said. Armed Forces Commander Gábor Böröndi said the exercise involved land, air and maritime forces. The air defence system has been activated, and the air and ground forces are moving, he said. "This is a test of the preparations we've made over the past years," he added.

BÓKA MEETS AUSTRIAN COUNTERPART IN VIENNA

János Bóka, the minister for European Union affairs, on Tuesday met Karoline Edtstadler, the Austrian Federal Minister for the EU and Constitution, in Vienna for bilateral talks on EU enlargement, strengthening competitiveness and the situation in the Middle East. EU competitiveness will be the central focal point of the Hungarian presidency in the second half of 2024, Bóka told a press conference after the talks. All other priorities will be derived from that, and see Austria as a reliable partner in that aim, he said.

Regarding the bloc's enlargement, Hungary's stance had always been unequivocal, he said. "If the EU used its resourcefulness to advance the enlargement process rather than to hinder it, the countries of the Western Balkans would have become members long ago." On the matter of Ukraine's accession, the member states must conduct an "open and honest" strategic debate before

making the decision, he said. Bóka said the debate would have to decide whether “accession talks with a country at war with a neighbouring nuclear power” would strengthen or weaken the EU. The member states will also have to determine the aim of the talks, “whether we want to spread peace or import war into the EU”.

The European solution to illegal migration should also be based on a consensus, possibly one rooted in an aim that “we, rather than people smugglers, should decide who we want to allow into the country”. The EU’s migration pact has failed to deliver results, he said. Bóka said that member states had started to look for opportunities outside of the pact. The agreement between Austria, Hungary and Romania “has already yielded results”, he said.

In the Middle East, Hungary has an interest in freeing the hostages, including the Hungarian citizens, and in preventing escalation and enabling Israel in “exercising self-defence effectively”, he said. Regarding the Hungarian presidency, Bóka said the government would strive to cooperate with all member states as an “honest and impartial mediator”.

Edtstadler said the talks were “open and honest”. She noted that Austria is Hungary’s third largest trading partner and one of its largest investors. Some 1,400 Austrian companies employ around 1,400 people in the country, she said. While Austria and Hungary hold different views on a number of issues, “the EU is a democracy and the

exchange of opinions is important”, she said. Hungary and Austria are on the same side on illegal migration, she added.

GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY CONVINCED W BALKANS BELONGS IN EU

Hungary is convinced that the Western Balkans’ place is in the European Union, Barna Pál Zsigmond, state secretary of the EU affairs ministry, said on Tuesday after meeting North Macedonian foreign ministry state secretary Filip Tosevski. Zsigmond said on Facebook that Tosevski had told him it was important for North Macedonia to be given a chance during Hungary’s EU presidency to present the steps it has taken in the interest of integration. Hungary is committed to the issue of the region’s EU integration and sees the Western Balkan countries as key partners, actively supporting their accession process, Zsigmond said, adding the government was convinced that the region’s integration would make the EU stronger and boost its competitiveness.

He said he and Tosevski had also talked about the importance of North Macedonians seeing that EU membership was a good thing and that the bloc offered a real perspective and opportunity at membership. Zsigmond said Hungary and North Macedonia shared very similar views on migration, adding that the aim was for there to be no illegal migrants on their countries’ territories.

The two officials also reviewed the parts of the European Commission’s new EU enlargement package that apply to North Macedonia. Zsigmond said he had assured Tosevski that Hungary would do everything it could to advance the integration of the countries that take meaningful steps in the interest of their EU accession.

GOVT OFFICIAL: MAJORITY ‘OUTSIDE TRANSATLANTIC BUBBLE’ WANTS PEACE

The majority of the world, “outside the transatlantic bubble”, wants peace, the state secretary for bilateral relations said on Tuesday, after an official visit to Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan wants peace, as does Hungary, and rejects weapons deliveries to Ukraine, Tamás Menczer said in a video on Facebook after meeting the Kyrgyz minister of economy, the deputy governor of the national bank, and attending a meeting of the Kyrgyz-Hungarian intergovernmental committee. Kyrgyzstan also suffers from the “failed Brussels sanctions”, he said. The intergovernmental meeting had been “productive”, he said, and highlighted water management, sustainable energy, agriculture and the food industry as the most important sectors in cooperation. The two countries signed an agreement on Hungary’s role in planning and constructing a water plant in Kyrgyzstan, he said. A 16 million dollar fund is also supporting Hungarian investments and developments in the country,

he said. Regarding cooperation in education, the Stipendium Hungaricum programme offers grants for 200 Kyrgyz students wishing to study in Hungary, he said.

FIDESZ MEP: BRUSSELS'S 'REVENGE POLITICS' MAKES MOCKERY OF HUNGARY

"Brussels's revenge politics" is making a mockery of Hungary and the entire institutional system of the European Union, Balázs Hidvéghi, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, said in a video on Facebook on Tuesday. Hidvéghi reacted to comments by Italian Social Democrat MEP Elisabetta Gualmini, who he said recently had called on the European Parliament to continue to pressure the European Commission not to give any funding to Hungary.

"They're no longer even trying to hide their political blackmail," Hidvéghi said. He said it was "completely clear that facts and the law no longer mean anything" to left-wing MEPs. "This is blatant, cynical political blackmail," he said, adding that its only aim was to "punish" Hungary for its political stances on the war, migration and child protection, and prevent the Hungarian people from gaining access to EU funds they were entitled to.

Hidvéghi also cited Gualmini as saying that though they had withdrawn the debate on the state of the rule of law in Hungary from the agenda, they would return to it later this month. He said this was

a stalling tactic on the part of left-wing MEPs to keep applying pressure to Hungary. "This is outrageous and unacceptable," he said. "There's no place for such political blackmail in European politics, which is why change is needed in Brussels, and that change can be brought about in next year's EP elections."

OFFICIAL: NATL CONSULTATION SURVEY TO COVER ISSUE OF FOREIGN INFLUENCE

The topics covered in the upcoming National Consultation public survey will include the issue of foreign influence operations, Csaba Dömötör, state secretary at the prime minister's cabinet, said on Tuesday. More and more information is coming out about foreign players supporting political actors in Hungary or groups of activists linked to them, at times with billions of forints, Dömötör said in a video on Facebook. The problem with this, he said, was not just their attempts to interfere in elections, but also that these donations were reflected in the positions of those who received them, mainly on issues like the war, the economy and migration. Hungary's government believes that stricter measures need to be taken against foreign influence peddling, he said, adding that the public would also be given the chance to express their opinion on the issue in the National Consultation survey.

SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED TO STRENGTHEN TIES WITH DIASPORA HUNGARIANS IN SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

The Prime Minister's Office department for Hungarian communities abroad is offering scholarships to strengthen ties with diaspora Hungarians in the southern hemisphere, the office said on Tuesday. The scholarships offered under the arrangements of the Sándor Kőrösi Csoma scheme launched this year are offered to Hungarians aged above 18, without a criminal record, with at least secondary school education and fluent English language skills, the statement said. Conversational knowledge in the language of the destination country is also desirable, it added. The destination countries are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and the planned timeframe is between February 15 and November 15, 2024, the office said. The four areas covered by the programme include scouting activities, preserving traditions, teaching and education, and community, sport, media and cultural activities. Applications by individuals and the receiving organisations can be submitted at www.korosiprogram.hu until December 13, 2023.

MORE THAN 8,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 4,852 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 3,741 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 60 people, ORFK said on Tuesday.

HUNGARY Q3 GDP UP 0.9% Q/Q

Hungary's economy in the third quarter expanded by 0.9% compared with the previous quarter, adjusted data show, and contracted by 0.4% year on year, based on unadjusted data, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Tuesday. Seasonally and calendar-adjusted data show it decreased by an annual 0.3%.

In the Q1-Q3 period, GDP contracted by 1.2% year on year. Márton Nagy, the economic development minister, said after the KSH release that restoring economic growth was "the next big task" after having curbed inflation. The ministry statement said that the economy began growing again in the

third quarter, adding that Hungarian growth had outperformed most other EU member states in the quarter. He said the war in Ukraine and associated sanctions, as well as "profiteering by multinationals", had battered the economy, businesses and families. Although quarterly growth was positive, the economy contracted on an annual basis, he noted, adding that the government still had work to do. Nagy referred to state-backed targeted loans under various schemes worth the equivalent of up to 1.5% of GDP, as well as the Factory Rescue scheme which subsidises energy-intensive businesses and frees companies from unfavourable energy contracts, among other measures.

SZIJJÁRTÓ DECORATES AUDI HUNGARIA HEAD

The cooperation between Hungary and German car-making giant Audi has been extremely successful, and key to Hungary emerging stronger from recent crises, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said on Tuesday, handing over the Hungarian Order of Merit, Knight's Cross, to Audi Hungaria board chairman Alfons Dintner. Dintner was awarded for his work to develop the works at the plant in Győr, in

north-western Hungary, and to deepen ties between the economy and higher education, as well as Hungarian-German economic relations, Péter Szijjártó said. By launching the manufacturing of electric engines in Győr, Audi also contributed to Hungary becoming one of the "winners of the automotive revolution", he said. The sector is the backbone of Hungary's industry, and its production value hit 10,000 billion forints (EUR 26.5bn) last year, he said. "Without Audi, Győr wouldn't be the most beautiful city in Hungary today, with the most modern prospects." The company's cooperation with the city's university has shown "the real direction of the economy", he said.

BIRD FLU DETECTED IN SE HUNGARY

Food safety authority Nébih on Tuesday said it has detected a highly pathogenic strand of bird flu at a goose farm in Csongrád-Csanád County, in south-eastern Hungary. A 3km protection zone as well as a surveillance zone were established after the virus subtype H5N1 was detected at the farm in Szentes, Nébih said, adding that some 6,000 geese would be culled.