

PHOTO OF THE DAY



PM Viktor Orbán addresses a conference marking 50 years of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU interior and justice ministers meet in Brussels

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

Paks operator on future plans for nuclear plant

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: FOREIGN POLICY 'INDEPENDENT'

Addressing an event held by the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Institute, the prime minister said Hungary "may not be a great power, but it still requires an independent foreign policy and expects this to be accepted" by larger countries.

At the conference in Budapest celebrating the 50th anniversary of MKI's foundation, Viktor Orbán said great powers with military and economic power earned respect and should not dish out warnings to their partners. "We Hungarians are not a great power; nevertheless we claim the right to an independent foreign policy, and others who are larger than us must accept our demand," he said. A country of such ambition and size must maintain a strong stance, the prime minister said. It must not run scared in a tough situation but rather square up to the conflict, he added.

Orbán said Hungary was successful on the international stage precisely because notwithstanding its small population of ten million, it still resolutely pursued an independent foreign policy. He said national interests formed the foundation of Hungarian foreign policies combining "the best elements of idealism and realism". A foreign policy based on the national interest could never be dogmatic, he said, since the national interest must be defined in every situation and action must be taken on that basis.

ORBÁN: HUNGARY MUST MAINTAIN STANCE OF STRENGTH

A country of the ambition and size of Hungary must maintain stance of strength, the prime minister told a conference celebrating the 50th anniversary of the MKI. It must not run scared in a tough situation but rather square up to the conflict. Orbán said Hungary was successful on the international stage precisely because notwithstanding its small population of ten million, it still resolutely pursued an independent foreign policy. He said Hungary should not heed the "siren call" to "teach the country a lesson" in how to pursue a "well-behaved" foreign policy.

Orbán said that throughout its history, Hungary had always been capable of pursuing a sovereign and independent foreign policy centred round the prime minister. He said countries with more ambitious goals relative to their size and economic power had to "have a tight hold on the reins of foreign policy", adding that in Hungary's constitutional system this meant that "it's good to have the prime minister holding them".

He insisted that a country with no relative advantages that wants to pursue an independent foreign policy must take a radical position. Such countries, he said, should have a broad vision and specific long-term goals and a strategy for becoming

a strong country respected by the rest. The prime minister noted that the previous government had had a "witty" argument against this by advising Hungary to "dare to be small". He said Hungary should not want to be the "pupil" of another world power, but rather its own master. Orbán said a radical position was necessary from a tactical standpoint so that the country could make certain concessions.

He said Hungary did not go into petty details such as the mechanism for distributing migrants, "because these are technical, not essential". "The essential question for a Hungarian is whether migration is a good thing in any way whatsoever," he said.

Orbán said Hungarian foreign policy asked questions not in a way that harmed Hungary's prestige but enhanced it. The idea was not only to express Hungary's standpoint but to defend it intellectually and politically, and fight for it, too, "turning it into something of a trademark", he said. "This is, in effect, Hungarian soft power," he added. Orbán said it was this that allowed Hungary to form a coalition with those who "aren't able to say what we say" but had the same goals.

The prime minister said the common view that radical critiques of an issue led to isolation rather than to prestige was mistaken and "doesn't match my experience". Hungarian foreign policy, he said, had seldom been as active or broad as in recent years, noting the policy of opening

to the East and South, intensive trade and investments and connectivity. "An intensive network of western relations, a booming opening to the East and South, speed, ability to act, trade, investments and connectivity" brought Hungary prestige rather than isolation, he said. National interests formed the foundation of Hungarian foreign policies, he said, combining "the best elements of idealism and realism". The word "national" was "the idealistic element" based on the nation as an idea, while the word "interest" equalled "realism", denoting what was necessary, useful and practical, he added. The most important task of a foreign policy based on the national interest, he said, was to define the national interest in every situation and take action on that basis. Such foreign policy, Orbán said, had intellectual content and carried principles and values while demanding flexibility from policymakers.

Orbán said he believed in the arsenal of broad and open networks and the "smart use of soft power", which he said was where the strength of Hungarian foreign policy lay. The prime minister said that as Hungary's foreign relations became more and more diverse, there was a growing need for preparatory work defining the national interest from the most qualified professionals. He noted that in the future, MKI will be overseen by the prime minister's political director under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office.

MENCZER: US AMBASSADOR 'BEHAVES LIKE A GOVERNOR'

US Ambassador to Hungary David Pressman "behaves as if Hungary were the 51st state of the United States and he were its governor," Tamás Menczer, the foreign affairs state secretary, told public television, referring to recent remarks by the ambassador made at the opening ceremony of the 12th Budapest Jewish and Israeli Film Festival, alluding to anti-Semitism on the subject of posters depicting Alex Soros. Menczer said: "We are a country with a statehood somewhat older than that of America ... and even in the most primitive political disputes, they don't argue that the Hungarian government would slam George Soros and his son because of their Jewishness." "We usually refer to [Soros and his son] as talented Hungarians, but the problem is that they use their talent for bad purposes: they support migration and war," Menczer said. "We support peace and we say 'no' to migration ... that decision by Hungarian voters must be respected and it is a problem that the US ambassador doesn't," he said. Menczer referred to the appreciation of international Jewish organisations, the prime minister of Israel and the Israeli ambassador to Hungary, suggesting that "Hungary is one of the best places in the world" in terms of security for people with a Jewish identity. He added that anti-Semitism, on the other hand, "has never been such a

great problem in the US as now", with Jewish people only representing 2% of the population but suffering some 55% of hate crime cases. Fully 88% of Jews viewed anti-Semitism as a problem in the US, he added.

HUNGARY 'HAS COMPLIED WITH EU DEMANDS'

Hungary has complied with all European Commission demands related to judicial reform and awaits the arrival of EU funds, the justice minister has said. Bence Tuzson told journalists during the break of a meeting of EU justice ministers that Hungary now considered EU discussions on judicial reform "to be closed". "We've replied to all questions and acceded to all requests connected to the release of EU funds," he said. "Now we'll see what the commission decides ... and we await the arrival of EU funds..." he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: MAINTAINING 'HUNGARIAN-POLISH BROTHERHOOD' KEY ELEMENT OF FOREIGN POLICY

Maintaining "Hungarian-Polish brotherhood" is a central element of Hungary's foreign policy strategy, even if the two countries may disagree on certain issues, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Monday. Hungary does not view its cooperation with Poland from a tactical perspective, Szijjártó said after meeting Szymon

Szynkowski vel Sek, his Polish counterpart, according to a ministry statement. "We see Hungarian-Polish relations as more than friendship and more than an alliance," Szijjártó said, adding that Hungary considered its ties with Poland a "brotherhood". "And even if we have disagreements, different points of emphasis or different approaches to certain issues, brotherhood is still brotherhood." Szijjártó said Hungary respected the Polish nation and its decisions, and strove for good cooperation with Poland's elected government. Maintaining "Hungarian-Polish brotherhood", he said, would remain one of the key components of Hungary's foreign policy strategy in the future, too.

Concerning his talks with Szymkowski vel Sek, Szijjártó said they had talked at length about the future of the European Union and specifically what he called renewed intentions to amend the founding treaties with a view to strengthening Brussels's powers. "We were in agreement that the interests of a strong Poland and strong Hungary lie in a strong European Union, but we also concurred that it is not member states that are looked down on, weakened or blackmailed that make the EU strong," Szijjártó said. "The European Union will be strong if the member states themselves are strong, if they can represent their interests and if they stand by and adhere to their historical and religious heritage and traditions." He said Hungary and Poland rejected "extreme" plans

aimed at creating “a kind of superstate”, handing “even more powers” to Brussels. “We think there’s enough power in Brussels already, and in fact the way we see it, whenever there’s a crisis or a challenging period, it’s the decisions made by member states and decisions made through intergovernmental agreements and cooperation that are a lot more effective, quicker and more efficient,” Szijjártó said.

He said Hungary and Poland insisted on the EU’s unanimity rule in decision-making where the treaties required it. “We don’t accept Brussels bureaucrats, Soros agents or even the bigger member states deciding about our own affairs,” he said. “Let’s think about what would happen if instead of us, it would be the various components of the Soros network making decisions in areas like defence policy, taxation, education or even energy supply,” Szijjártó added. Meanwhile, he said Hungary and Poland rejected efforts to legalise illegal migration. “We reject efforts from Brussels to blackmail member states into giving up our sovereign right to decide to whom we allow entry into Hungary and whom we want to live together with,” the minister said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY CONDEMNS ATTACK ON CATHOLICS IN PHILIPPINES

The foreign minister on Sunday issued a condemnation of a bombing during a Catholic service in the southern

Philippines city of Marawi which took the lives of four people and injured 50 earlier in the day. Hungary is providing 5 million forints (EUR 13,200) in emergency relief to the relatives of the injured and deceased through the Philippines Catholic Charity, Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook. Hungary, he said, always stood up for Christians around the world. “We strongly condemn the attack on Catholics practising their religion ... on the first Sunday of Advent,” he wrote. The attack took place in the city with the country’s largest Muslim population.

GULYÁS MARKS 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH GERMANY

Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister’s Office, attended a conference marking the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Hungary and Germany, in Budapest on Monday. Ties between the two countries “are so deeply rooted and so complex that they cannot be assessed exclusively on basis of the political situation at the moment,” he said in his address.

Hungarian-German relations are “good, intensive, and affect many areas of life,” Gulyás said. Gulyás noted that “it has always been the German economy and German culture that had the strongest presence in Hungary”, adding that “friendship between the two peoples has prevailed even in the hardest times.”

He also added that “though we will have better political ties, we can be proud of our economic and cultural relations.”

As for the economy, he said Germany’s presence was “decidedly strong”, Hungarian-German business transactions accounting for 25% of Hungary’s foreign trade turnover. Ninety percent of German investors in Hungary are “most satisfied” with the business environment, he added. Citing surveys, Gulyás said most Germans viewed Hungarians positively, while over two-thirds of Hungarians had expressed their preferences for Germany. Hungary has an interest in Germany having a stable government, in maintaining good ties with that country and that “dialogue should remain factual in all areas”. “Hardly any other countries have such strong linguistic and cultural ties; this is what should be appreciated in politics,” he said. “Politics is working to worsen the situation but the overall picture is not as bad that we should despair,” he added.

Former German ambassador to Hungary Ursula Seiler-Albring said bilateral ties were “friendly and resting on good foundations”. She said that “while there may be temporary tensions” the do not make good relations impossible and the parties “stay in communication and seek solutions that are acceptable for both sides”. “Germans and Hungarians have always understood each other well,” she added. Julia Gross, the incumbent ambassador, expressed her country’s

gratitude for Hungary's role in the process of Germany's reunification." "We will always be grateful to Hungary," she said.

PINTÉR: 10% PAY RAISE FOR TEACHERS FROM JAN

Sándor Pintér, the interior minister, told lawmakers on Monday that a 10% pay raise for teachers from January was "definitely" in the pipeline. The aim is for Hungarian children to be educationally competitive in the European Union, and to achieve this it was essential to increase the social recognition of teachers and boost their pay as part of a differentiated, performance-based salary system. The law on the new teacher's career model has been designed with this in mind, he said at his annual hearing before the parliament's culture committee. He said the new public education employment law had the backing of "most teachers", with 70% agreeing that performance should be a factor when setting pay. Not every teacher's salary will increase, he added. Teachers who work in regions that are striving to close the gap with richer ones may be set 20% higher, in order to encourage teachers to work in more deprived areas. With a view to reducing administrative burdens, self-evaluation has been scrapped, while principals now have carte blanche to extend the winter or spring break to take into account how tired students are, he said. Also, schools will stay open for an extra hour, until 6pm.

Regarding digitalizing the education system, Pintér said 55,000 laptops have already been distributed to teachers and 65,000 to students, and another 140,000 will be issued to students this year. Also, smart textbooks with digital content will be available and a digital log of grades and other information pertinent to the student must be accessible for parents online, he added. In the 2022-2023 year, 10 billion forints was spent on the development of school digital networks, with Wi-Fi and smart classrooms established in 180 schools.

The minister said it should be examined whether criticisms of the national core curriculum were justified, and this would be treated as a central issue. To ensure harmony between kindergarten, elementary school, secondary school and further education, a government education committee will be established under the leadership of the prime minister, Pintér said. Meanwhile, the minister told lawmakers that 5,200 Ukrainian children attending school in Hungary were also provided with school materials. Pintér said schools had maintained their financial stability and none were indebted.

VARGA AT CLIMATE SUMMIT: HUNGARY COULD BE AMONG WINNERS OF GREEN TRANSITION

Hungary has the financial means "to make the country a winner of the global economic green transition,"

Finance Minister Mihály Varga told the United Nations Climate Conference in Dubai. "To be successful we must produce and store green energy, and the government will utilise every means to achieve this," Varga said. Hungary, he added, was one of a few countries able to increase its industrial production and reduce its emissions at the same time. He added, however, that "green energy is the future of the Hungarian economy". Efforts were being made, he said, to transform the economy into a modern and sustainable system. "The new economic world order is being shaped in the competition of national economies and businesses, and since Hungary started making green investments in time, its prospects are good," Varga said. The minister mentioned Hungary's tax policy involving climate targets in the national budget, and issuing green bonds as tools to achieve those targets, adding that "Hungary is especially successful" in this respect.

AGMIN HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF BIODIVERSITY AT BUDAPEST CLIMATE SUMMIT

Hungary's agriculture ministry and the MBH Bank have launched a project focusing on the protection of species, forests and water with an aim of preserving biodiversity, the agriculture minister said in a speech at the Budapest Climate Summit.

The schemes will be implemented in national parks, "showing that political and economic players are both committed to nature and environmental protection," Nagy said. Preservation works have restored the natural environment to the original state on 300,000 hectares he said, adding that the total of environmental investments came to some 90 billion forints (EUR 238m) since 2012. The government sees the protection of "natural capital" and the resources of biodiversity, farmland, climate regulation, pure water and air as strategic issues, he said.

GOVT EYES NEW 'MILLENNIUM CITY CENTRE' IN DOWNTOWN BUDAPEST

Hungary's government is in talks with the world's top property developers on a 5 billion euro project that would transform a 130 hectare area in downtown Budapest into a "millennium city centre", the minister of construction and transport said on Monday. The project that would be carried out at the location of the Rákosszentmiklósy train station in the 14th district would elevate Budapest to the ranks of modern global cities, János Lázár told a press conference. The initial assessment and depollution work would cost around 20 billion forints (EUR 52.8m), Lázár said, noting that the government had committed to carrying out around 1 billion euros worth of infrastructure investments.

The government expects the intergovernmental agreement on the investment to be signed in the second half of 2024, he said, adding that the project could be completed by the end of the decade. "Our goal is for Budapest to be the strongest intellectual, economic and political power centre in the region," Lázár said.

Reacting to Lázár's press conference, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said there could be no development project in the capital that put the interest of the investors before those of Budapest residents. Karácsony told a press conference that the city's leadership was engaged in "a social dialogue of historic importance" with the government on the planned project. The mayor said he agreed with Lázár that the Rákosszentmiklósy area was a valuable one, adding, however, that the area needed developments that served the interests of Budapest residents, such as the extension of the underground, other railway developments and housing construction. Also, Karácsony said the city would not support any investment that would spoil the view of Budapest's world heritage sites like Heroes' Square or Andrássy Avenue.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY AMONG WINNERS OF NEW ECONOMIC ERA IN EUROPE

Hungary is among the winners of the transition to the electric car industry thanks to the government developing the best possible cooperation

with market players, the foreign minister, Péter Szijjártó, told an event announcing an investment by US company BorgWarner. As a result of the planned development worth 25 billion forints (EUR 66bn), the company already employing more than a 1,000 people in Hungary will manufacture products suitable for hybrid and electric vehicles in Oroszlány, west of Budapest.

The state is advancing 5 billion forints in support for the project, contributing to the creation of 60 new jobs, he added.

Szijjártó noted that besides China and Germany, Hungary is the only country in the world where all three premium German car brands have production capacities. Also, five of the world's ten largest battery makers have committed themselves to Hungary, and over the past ten years, the production value of the car industry in Hungary has increased by 3.5-fold in terms of the combined growth of manufacturers and suppliers, he said.

The 12,000 billion forints production value of the industry last year was record-breaking, and an additional 18% increase was registered in the first nine months of this year, he added. US investments play an important role in maintaining the growth of the Hungarian economy, he said. The affected companies represent the second largest investment community in Hungary, and the government has signed strategic cooperation agreements with 14 of

them, he added. Bilateral trade broke a record last year and 11% increase was registered in the first nine months of this year, showing that another record high can be expected in 2023, he said.

OFFICIAL: GOVT CONSIDERS ETHNIC HUNGARIAN FARMERS STRATEGIC ALLIES

The government considers ethnic Hungarian farmers in other countries strategic partners, a ministry of agriculture official told the 12th Cooperation Forum of the Carpathian Basin. State secretary Sándor Farkas said that beyond being an annual professional forum, the event was also a "celebration" demonstrating the power of regional cooperation. "We share what we have in order to have more," he added.

Barna Pál Zsigmond, the state secretary at the ministry of European Union affairs, said cooperation between Hungarians and ethnic Hungarians abroad was working effectively also in the agricultural sector.

Árpád János Potápi, the state secretary in charge of policies for Hungarian communities, said networks played an important role also in the case of ethnic Hungarian farmers abroad who represented the largest network of the Carpathian Basin. "All efforts must be made to keep Hungarian land in Hungarian ownership and help Hungarian farmers to as much land as possible," he added.

CULTURE MINISTER: NEW CULTURE REGULATION TO CREATE 'SIMPLE, TRANSPARENT, UNIFIED FRAMEWORK'

The new legislation of cultural affairs, which the government is planning to submit to parliament next summer, aims to create a simple, transparent and unified framework for all disciplines, the culture minister said on Monday. At his annual hearing before parliament's cultural committee, Janos Csak said that when he took over the ministry in 2022, two-thirds of the funding went to Budapest. The ministry started to change that "in small steps", and plans to continue that work in cooperation with representatives of various disciplines, he said. "I maintain what I said last year: I won't abolish educational institutions or any other kind, but I will vet them all," he said. He said that thanks to a revamping of the "statistical system", the ministry now had exact data on the operations of institutions.

DEBRECEN PREPARES ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

The city of Debrecen, in eastern Hungary, has prepared the basis for a "historic" environment control system, László Papp, the city's mayor, said on Monday. Referring to a "stormy" public hearing concerning a new Chinese battery plant in Debrecen earlier this

year, the mayor said he had pledged to introduce a comprehensive monitoring system based on input by Debrecen University experts, independent of similar systems operated by relevant authorities. The new system will cover the city and the greater Debrecen area, with monitoring points already determined, Papp said, adding that deployment of the system will start next year, and "the first data will be recorded before the large plants start operating". György Kossa, the head of the foundation running Debrecen University, said the university will "record and assess environmental impacts and will do everything, in cooperation with the city, in the interest of residents' safety". MP Lajos Kósa noted the key significance of storing energy, which "needs to be done in a way that it does not jeopardise the public". The city "takes care of its residents ... we cannot do anything that jeopardises residents, but developments must go ahead," he said.

MI HAZÁNK PROPOSES TO LINK SUFFRAGE TO LITERACY

The Mi Hazánk party wants the right to vote to be linked to the ability to read and write, the party's deputy head said on Monday. Előd Novák told a press conference that "for parties committing election fraud, it is easiest to buy the votes of those who can't read or write." While Mi Hazánk has no intention of excluding anyone

from the elections because of their ethnicity, "this problem may affect Gypsies in Hungary the most", he said. The radical party would also take steps against buying votes and bussing voters to ballot stations, among other methods, he said. The proposal would also ban dual citizens from running for office in Hungary, he said. Under the proposal, constituents could recall lawmakers and MPs' immunity would be scrapped. Further, the president would be elected directly, prime ministerial candidates would have to hold open debates, and all parties would be obligated to write a manifesto, Novák said. Also, the media authority should be manned by government and opposition delegates in equal numbers, he said.

MORE THAN 8,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY

Fully 4,507 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 3,813

came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 72 people, ORFK said on Monday.

LIGET BUDAPEST AWARDED WTA EUROPE'S LEADING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The Liget Budapest Project, a 10-year project to upgrade Budapest City Park, has won the title of Europe's Leading Tourism Development Project 2023 at the World Travel Awards, the project leader said on Monday. The World Travel Awards is one of the most prestigious awards in travel, tourism and hospitality, which elects its winners from thousands of world-class developments every year, Benedek Gyorgyevics, the head of the company responsible for the project, said.

The upgrade of City Park aimed "to put the venue on the must-see list of foreigners visiting Budapest," Gyorgyevics said. Rising

visitor numbers at the House of Music Hungary, the Museum of Ethnography and BalloonFly, a hot-air balloon inspired by a painting of Hungarian artist Pál Szinyei Merse, show that the park is now "on the map of international tourism again", he said. The long-term goal is to make City Park a destination that is "worthy of recurring visits in and of itself", he said.

Liget Budapest is unique also because it unites 150-year-old buildings, modern structures and nature, creating a unique space for recreation, Gyorgyevics said. Gyorgyevics said the project was the largest cultural investment in Europe, "in scope and complexity". The House of Music and the Museum of Ethnography both won the International Property Awards, and the former was also awarded as the best musical property development at the Music Cities Awards in 2021, Gyorgyevics said. In the same year, the revamping of the Museum of Fine Arts won the Europa Nostra Prize, he added.