

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Tamás Vasvári

Ski resort opens in Eplény, W Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

PM Orbán to attend inauguration of new Argentinian president

Hungarian scientists Karikó, Krausz receive Nobel Prize at ceremony

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: UKRAINE EU INTEGRATION 'UNTIMELY'

Ukraine's integration into the European Union "is extremely untimely", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told the French weekly Le Point in an interview published on Friday.

Orbán said accession was not being prepared adequately, and its structure did not ensure "it will bring in more than it costs", Orbán said in a wide-ranging interview covering migration, NATO's role, a joint European defence system and the EP elections. Ukraine "is one of the most corrupt countries in the world and it is not ready for EU accession," he said. Hungary, as Ukraine's neighbour, "knows exactly what's going on there, no matter what they think in Paris, Brussels or the Hague," Orbán said. He rejected the charge that Hungary was vetoing EU initiatives. "Let's just say we don't consent to them. "Ukraine's EU membership would burden the other member states, which would have to pay more contributions, he said. France, he added, would have to contribute 3.5 billion euros more every year than they had done so far. Folding Ukrainian agriculture into the EU system would "ruin" the sector in other countries, he warned. Orbán proposed establishing a strategic partnership with Ukraine, saying this would open possibilities to signing agreements on agriculture, tariffs and security.

ORBÁN: UKRAINE MINORITY RIGHTS NOT UP FOR NEGOTIATION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in an interview with French weekly *Le Point*, said minority rights in Ukraine were not up for negotiation. Ukraine must respect those rights, regardless of their accession plans, he said. Also, the matter did not depend on whether the EU would pay the 10 billion euros it has been withholding from Hungary, Orbán said. "Technical issues such as finances must not be mixed up with historic challenges." He said more than two-thirds of Hungarians were opposed to starting accession talks with Ukraine -- as was the country's parliament. Orbán noted that he had never supported sanctions against Russia, "as it would be hard to find an example in European history when sanctions worked." He insisted Europeans had been "betrayed" on the issue of badly phrased, badly implemented" sanctions. "How do you explain that although Russia is under sanctions, the US has doubled its purchases of nuclear fuels? When we talk about sanctions, others -- especially the US -- circumvent them and conclude successful business deals."

Asked about his relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Orbán said: "Russia is a different country in terms of its history, politics and geography ... It can't be compared with Europe ... where freedom is one

of the fundamental values." He said preserving unity, rather than freedom, was the key issue. "We can't expect Russia to be like Europe," he said. "The question is whether our differences stop us from cooperating," he said, adding that such logic would make cooperation impossible "with two-thirds of the planet". "Russia is here and it's strong," he said.

Orbán said that as he grew up in a communist country he had experienced a "dichotomy" that put the West on the one side and the Soviet Union on the other. He said he wanted to avoid a resurgence of an approach of "us against the world".

ORBÁN: 'WE CAN'T BE ASSURED MIXING CULTURES WILL BE BETTER THAN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY'

"Hungarians may not necessarily follow the examples of other countries such as France. We cannot be fully assured that mixing cultures will be any better than our traditional society," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview with French weekly *Le Point*. Put to him that he could help the Italian government handle illegal migration, Orbán said he was "trying to be as helpful as possible" but the European Union's new migration pact "simply went in the wrong direction". He said he was experienced on the issue of migration and was "proud" that "no migrants are in Hungary". "Every now and then some will manage to get into the country, but sooner or later

they are pushed back," he said. Orbán said the Hungarian government was working to ensure that nobody could enter without a Hungarian permit, and this practice "should be copied by every European state". Asylum seekers are required to stay outside Hungary and wait for the Hungarian authorities to assess their request, he noted. "This is the only good formula for handling illegal migration." He warned that if illegal migrants entered Europe before being granted legal entry, "they may never be sent back".

Asked what he would do if Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister, asked Hungary for a plane to take illegal migrants back to Africa, Orbán said: "I have made that proposition at least a hundred times." Concerning the EU's migration policy, Orbán said if the European Commission declared a migration emergency, Hungary would be required to accommodate migrants or pay a fine. "I am willing to pay if the EU takes over at least 30% of our border control costs ... we have spent over 2 billion euros," he said.

ORBÁN: SEVERAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE 'DEMOCRACY DEFICIT'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told French weekly *Le Point* in an interview that several countries in Europe had a "democracy deficit", with "people considering politics as something for the elite and ... turning to movements outside the elite". He said Europe was dominated by "two kinds of dynamics:

one is centrist and the other focused on national sovereignty ... when they are balanced the EU works well." He added, however, that the equilibrium had been upended by Brexit and "London's secession has weakened central Europe", resulting in "a strengthening of sometimes extremist elements advocating national sovereignty".

Concerning the rule of law, Orbán said the EU Treaties did not include a definition. "Rather than the states jointly coming up with a definition, the rule of law has become a weapon in the hands of those working to build a more centralised EU," he said. The prime minister noted that the EU had launched a rule-of-law mechanism against Hungary when ruling Fidesz quit the European People's Party. "We are innocent but also vulnerable," Orbán said, adding that the rule of law "should be taken more seriously and not used as a political weapon". Hungary's constitution honours the separation of the branches of government as well as religious freedoms, Orbán noted.

On another subject, Orbán said his Fidesz party was in consultations with Meloni's European Conservatives and Reformers group, and "Budapest would be glad to join either before or after next summer's EP elections." He said the Identity and Democracy group of parties was also "close to Fidesz" and regretted that the two groups had not yet negotiated a cooperation deal. "Unless the non-traditional right-wing parties are willing to cooperate, we will

never have a majority," Orbán said. He said the EP elections could bring about a turnaround because "the liberal elite, the Brussels bureaucrats, no longer represent the EU's fundamental goals". While the EU had been "a pledge of peace and welfare", currently "there is no peace and life has not improved". "The time has come for parties outside mainstream politics, the non-traditional right-wing parties, to take the reins and restore peace and security..." the prime minister said.

ORBÁN: HUNGARY, SERBIA ONLY SUCCESSFUL TOGETHER

Serbs can only be successful by working together with Hungarians and vice versa, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview to Serbian news agency Tanjug. He said in the interview published on Friday that Hungary, a Christian, Catholic country, had succeeded building "fruitful" relations with Serbia, noting issues on which they could work to the countries' mutual benefit, such as the European integration of Serbia, the situation in Kosovo, the Hungarian national minority in Vojvodina and Hungary's position in the European Union.

ORBÁN TRAVELS TO ARGENTINA TO ATTEND MILEI'S INAUGURATION, MEET BOLSONARO

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán travelled to Buenos Aires to attend the Sunday inauguration of Javier Milei, the newly

elected president. During the two-day visit, Orbán will also meet former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

SZIJJÁRTÓ CALLS FOR COOPERATION TO SUPPORT STABILITY IN AFRICA

The support of European countries is greatly needed to ensure Africa's stability, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after talks with Ugandan counterpart Jeje Odongo Abubakar in Kampala on Friday. At a joint press conference, Szijjártó said the security of Europe and Africa was interdependent, adding that Hungary was active in participating in such efforts. Szijjártó said some of Europe's security challenges "cannot be resolved without Africa". Countries such as Uganda could "slow down migration and ensure stability in the region", he said, but those countries needed support. Uganda has accommodated some 1.5 million refugees, while the Hungarian government has built three schools for the largest refugee camp in the country, helped with modernising Uganda's public administration system, set up a mobile health centre and refurbished a cardiology hospital, as well as creating a cybersecurity centre to protect Uganda's financial sector, Szijjártó said. The Hungarian government is also ready to help with services to refugees, improve drinking water supply, and develop Uganda's agriculture, he added. Referring to the global impact of the war in Ukraine,

Szijjártó said: "It is clear that soaring inflation and worsening food security is having an impact on those who are in no way responsible for the conflict, whether Hungary or Africa". He said: "The global majority strives for peace ... we may be a minority in Europe and in the Transatlantic region, but we belong to that global majority."

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY COMPLETES 'LARGEST EVER' ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCHEME IN AFRICA

The Hungarian government has completed its "largest economic development programme in Africa ever" in Uganda, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Kampala on Friday. As part of the programme, Hungary has helped reinforce Uganda's financial sector against cyberattacks, Szijjártó said. Speaking at the inauguration of a cybersecurity project, financed from 1.5 billion forints (EUR 3.9m) of tied aid and implemented by a Hungarian company, the minister said it was designed to increase cyber security capacities and reinforce the system of mobile payments there. He said the programme served to increase Africa's security, adding that "Europe's security largely depends on that of Africa". He added that cybersecurity was a crucial component of physical security.

"Uganda's security and stability are in the interest of Europe and Hungary, with special regard to the fact that Uganda accommodates the

largest number of refugees in Africa ... that country is an important pillar of regional security and stability," he said, warning that compromising that stability could trigger further waves of migration impacting Europe.

To reduce the pressure of illegal migration "we need to create a situation in which locals are helped to stay in their homeland and aid is delivered at the source of the problem," he said. "Uganda can continue to rely on Hungary in terms of preserving its stability and security," the minister said. Szijjártó said the increasing significance of the digital space went hand in hand with an increase in the number and size of cyberattacks "not only targeting the devices of private individuals but jobs, power grids, transport, hospitals, and government agencies ... with a special focus on the financial and banking sector."

NATIONAL COACH COMPANY STAFF TO HOLD 2-DAY STRIKE

Employees of national coach company Volánbusz will start a two-day strike on Sunday to protest against the absence of plans for higher pay in 2024. The Szolidaritás union said it is organising the strike action. Volánbusz told MTI that none of the other "nearly 20" unions representing its employees supported the strike. Volánbusz said it would provide minimum services on Sunday and Monday, with information about the cancelled services published

on its website. The company also said it would appeal against a primary ruling that approved the planned strike action as legitimate.

KARÁCSONY: CITY LEADERSHIP INSISTS ON 2019 INVESTMENT PLAN FOR BUDAPEST AREA

Budapest's leadership insists on the 2019 concept for the planned 5 billion euro investment in the Rákosszentmihály area of the capital, and a social consultation on the matter will be held next year, Gergely Karácsony, the city's mayor, said on Friday. Karácsony slammed the government for choosing an investor in an interstate agreement before negotiating on what to implement, and he insisted that the issue enjoyed a broad professional and political consensus. He said the state was involved in the investment as a financier and owner, but it should also involve the city's leadership. The mayor said the zone in question should be compact and green, with 8-10 thousand apartments and 30-40 hectares of public park. The minister of construction and transport announced on Monday that Hungary's government was in talks with the world's top property developers on a 5 billion euro project that would transform the 130 hectare area into a "millennium city centre". The 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.

NÉZŐPONT: VAST MAJORITY AGAINST UKRAINIAN GMO IMPORTS

Fully 87% of respondents to a Nézőpont survey say Hungary should not allow genetically modified produce to be imported from Ukraine, the Nézőpont Institute said on Friday. According to the phone survey of 1,000 adults conducted between December 4 and 6, only 5% said such Ukrainian imports should be permitted. Referring to earlier surveys, Nézőpont said 62% of the Hungarian population opposed Kyiv's endeavours to join the European Union, adding that their reservations may be rooted in their rejection of agricultural imports from Ukraine. Nézőpont added that respondents who were against Ukrainian imports were "in the majority irrespective of political affiliation".

FINANCE MINISTRY: GOVT TO CURB DEFICIT, DEBT DESPITE HIGHER EXPENSES

The government is working to ensure budget resources to preserve the value of pensions, maintain family subsidies and the utility price cut scheme, despite the significant pressure due to the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis resulting

from sanctions and the high-risk global economic environment, the finance ministry said on Friday. Hungary's cash flow-based budget deficit was 4,074.3 billion forints (EUR 10.7bn) at the end of November, the finance ministry said in a first reading of data.

The central budget deficit reached 3,824.9 billion forints at the end of the month and the social security funds were 421.3 billion in the red. Separate state funds had a 171.9 billion surplus. The general government deficit widened from 3,487.6 billion forints at the end of October. The full-year deficit target is 3,400.2 billion. The deficit reached 4,753.4 billion forints in 2022. Between January-November, the costs of the utility price cap scheme came to 1,333.8 billion forints, up from 394.2 billion forints in the same period last year, the statement said. The budget has also pre-financed European Union schemes, totalling 2,402 billion forints between January and November. Meanwhile, incoming EU funding came only to 1,265.4 billion forints, it said. In November, the government increased pensions by 3.5% to preserve their value. The raise cost the annual budget 188.2 billion forints, raising the total of pensions-related costs in the first 11 months of the year to 5,313.4 billion. Health-care costs came to 2,189.1 billion in the same period. Revenues from taxes and contributions have grown by an annual 15.9% in the same period. Total revenues of the central budget were 18% higher than in the same period last year, the statement said.

HUNGARY OCT TRADE SURPLUS EUR 1.037 BN

Hungary posted a trade surplus of 1.037 billion euros in October, down from 1.340 billion in the previous month, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said in a first reading of the data on Friday. Exports rose by an annual 1.2%, to 12.786 billion euros, while imports dropped by 13.3%, to 11.749 billion. In January-October, Hungary's exports increased by an annual 6.6%, to 126.651 billion euros, while imports fell by 6.1%, to 117.687 billion, with a trade surplus of 7.963 billion.

HUNGARY NOV CONSUMER PRICES UP 7.9% YR/YR

Consumer prices in Hungary were 7.9% higher in November than in the same month a year earlier, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. Month on Month, prices were flat, though the price of vehicle fuels fell by 3.6%.

Food prices rose by 7.1%, slowing from a 10.4% increase in the previous month. Household energy prices fell by 18.1%, albeit from a high base. Gas prices were 36.2% lower and electricity prices declined by 3.5%. Prices in the category of goods that includes vehicle fuel rose by 14%. Motor fuel prices increased by 25.4%. Harmonised CPI, calculated for better comparison with other European Union member states, was 7.7%. Core inflation, which excludes volatile fuel and food prices, was 9.1%.

Commenting on the data, Márton Nagy, the economic development minister, said the government had fulfilled its commitment to push inflation into single digits by October, two months ahead of year-end as originally expected. Inflation, he said, fell below 8% in November, helping families and the economy. The minister said in a statement that the disinflationary trend indicated the efficacy of the government's targeted measures. To further curb price increases, the government is extending mandatory price caps on basic foods until July 1, he said. The price of basic foodstuffs will be further monitored, with the number of monitored goods expected to grow from 62 to 80 to include lactose and gluten free goods, beef and duck, he said. Meanwhile, other indicators, he said, showed that Hungary's economy may return to its earlier growth path next year. Economic growth in the

third quarter was one of the fastest in Europe, and the purchase value of real wages has also started to grow, he said.

MORE THAN 9,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 4,501 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 4,712 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 45 people, ORFK said on Friday.

BRADLEY-FARRELL'S BOOK ON HUNGARIAN POLITICS PRESENTED IN NEW YORK

A book analysing Hungarian politics by Shea Bradley-Farrell, the head of the Counterpoint Institute, was

presented in New York of Thursday. Last Warning to the West is the result of the author's months-long research in Hungary as a leading researcher of the Centre for Fundamental Rights (Alapjogokért Központ). At the event, the author recommended the Hungarian government's policies as an antidote to progressive aspirations. She said leftist ideology in the US threatened to undermine people's freedom. Hungarian history set an example of standing up against conquering forces, she said.

Alapjogokért's head, Miklós Szánthó, said Hungary had been resisting foreign powers wanting to assimilate the country since the times of its first king, St Stephen. While Hungary had always been a conflict zone during clashes between powers, it could become a meeting point of East and West in times of peace, he said. "That is why we reject the logic of the new Cold War and woke brainwashing..." he said.