

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Fog in northern Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plenary session of parliament

**Events related to the wars
in Ukraine, Israel**

EU General Affairs Council meets

**European Parliament
holds plenary session**

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ MEETS UKRAINE COUNTERPART

Péter Szijjártó, who met Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in Brussels on Monday, said on Facebook that Hungary did not see its stance on Ukraine's EU accession bid as a tactical issue.

"For us this isn't a tactical issue but a decision of historic proportions regarding the future of the entire European Union," the foreign minister said, adding that the European Commission had no clue what effect Ukraine's EU membership would have on the bloc. "It's enough to think back to the intractable problems the Commission's decision on grain transit and Ukraine scrapping the licensing requirement for lorries," he said. Szijjártó insisted, moreover, that the Commission had not prepared the ground for ensuring that Ukraine pursued mutually beneficial accession talks. Referring to the restriction of the rights of the Hungarian national minority in Ukraine, he said "this cast a shadow on bilateral relations", adding that Hungary demanded the restoration of conditions pertaining in 2015. Szijjártó said, however, that whereas a meeting in person with Kuleba had not taken place since the outbreak of the war, they had kept in regular contact with the aim of improving Hungary-Ukraine ties.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY WON'T 'GIVE IN TO PRESSURE'

The Hungarian government will "continue to make its decisions in line with European and national values" and "will not give in to pressure from anyone, whether in the form of bribery or pledges," Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook. Ahead of "historic meetings affecting Europe's future" to be held in Brussels this week, Szijjártó said there were signs of "appalling political and media pressure". "The European political and media elite obviously mixes up completely different dimensions trying to resolve historical and strategic issues through tactical deals," he said, but added "they will not succeed, obviously, we will not give our consent." Debates between foreign ministers of the EU and in the general affairs council will focus on Ukraine, he said, adding that "a large part of EU politicians seek to pass decisions that are largely unprepared for and lack a strategic consensus."

Speaking at a press conference after a meeting of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council, Szijjártó said Hungary was under "tremendous political and media pressure" to approve the start of EU accession talks with Ukraine "despite the situation not being suitable for this right now". According to a ministry statement, Szijjártó said the pressure on Hungary was "unacceptable", and he vowed

that the country would not give up its national interests or the right to make its own sovereign decisions. "We don't accept being pressured, and we'll also resist any attempts at blackmail..." Szijjártó said. "And I'd like to make it clear that we continue to refuse to conflate historical-strategic and tactical dimensions." "This is not a tactical position on our part," he said, arguing that the question of when Ukraine could begin accession talks would have "serious historic consequences, too". The minister said any decision in connection with Ukraine's potential accession talks could only be made after a preparatory phase, adding however that the conditions for these preparations were not in place. He said the European Commission's assessment that Ukraine had met four of the seven pre-conditions for talks was incorrect. Hungary, he said, supported looking at mutually beneficial ways to enhance cooperation with Ukraine, adding that EU membership was not the only option. Deciding on starting accession talks now would be "irresponsible", Szijjártó said, arguing that it was impossible to know the effects of such a decision. He cited the effects of the EU's resolutions on opening transit corridors for Ukrainian grain and exempting Ukrainian hauliers from seeking permits before entering bloc, saying the EU "could not salvage what was salvageable".

Meanwhile, he said the Hungarian government had still not approved

allocating an additional 500 million euros from the European Peace Facility for weapons deliveries to Ukraine, arguing that Kyiv's list of international war sponsors still contained Hungarian entities and individuals, mainly linked to OTP Bank.

Asked to comment on Ukraine's amended law on minorities, Szijjártó said Hungary and Transcarpathian ethnic Hungarian organisations would assess the legislation, adding it was already clear that it had failed not restore the rights minorities had been gradually stripped of since 2015. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said that on Monday afternoon, he will meet his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, and Olha Stefanishyna, Ukraine's deputy prime minister for Euro-Atlantic integration.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY REPELS ATTACKS ENDANGERING ENERGY SUPPLY

Hungary has staved off threats endangering its energy supply, having obtained exemptions to provisions in the new European Union sanctions package, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said in Brussels on Monday. In the press conference held during the break of the European Union Foreign Affairs Council, which discussed the twelfth sanctions package against Russia, Hungary quashed a deadline for ending the exemption it has enjoyed to buy Russian crude oil through the Druzhba Pipeline. Without the pipeline,

Hungary and Slovakia would not be supplied adequately since Croatian transit capacity was too limited, he said. As well as defeating “this hostile step”, Hungary appeared to have secured the extension of the rule which expired on Dec 5 enabling Hungarian oil and gas company MOL to continue exporting refined Russian crude oil to the Czech and Croatian markets.

Szijjártó said the sanctions package would not be vetoed if the important economic interest of Hungary were not undermined. “It appears that the European Commission has accepted this and the draft of the sanctions proposal will include it; we’ll see,” he said. Further, all sanctions proposals relating to the nuclear industry were rejected, he said. Such proposals would have rendered the expansion of Hungary’s Paks nuclear power plant, which was crucial to the country’s energy security, impossible, he added. Also, regarding financial transactions outside the European Union, the adoption of restrictions that would harm national interests were abandoned, he said, adding that the government did not support the addition of either Chinese or Turkish companies to the sanctions list.

MKI: NO BASIS FOR EU TO START UKRAINE ACCESSION TALKS

It would be premature for the European Union to start accession talks with Ukraine, the Hungarian Institute for

Foreign Affairs (MKI) said in a report. Ahead of this week’s meeting of the European Council, MKI said Ukraine was not ready to join the EU, and the bloc had failed to say how its accession would work in practice politically and economically. The European Commission had set conditions in four areas and none had been met, the MKI said, citing the issues of how judges are selected, the vetting of the country’s supreme judicial council, combatting money laundering and media freedom. Ukraine had failed to act against corruption and oligarchs, MKI said, adding that the treatment of the country’s national minorities still fell short of European norms. Allowing a country without full control over its territory to join would bring the war to the bloc, its study added. Also, Ukraine’s economy is highly dependent on foreign aid, it said, and its accession would impose a sustained financial burden. Ukraine would be unable to meet the requirements of price stability without huge foreign support to stabilise the Ukrainian currency, MKI added. Further, Ukraine’s expedited accession would discredit the EU in the eyes of the Western Balkan countries and the other candidate member states, the institute’s report said.

ORBÁN MEETS ZELENSKY AT ARGENTINIAN PRESIDENT’S INAUGURATION

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met and exchanged a few

words as suggested by photos and footage made at the inauguration ceremony of Javier Milei, Argentina’s new president, in Buenos Aires on Sunday. Asked by MTI, Bertalan Havasi, the prime minister’s press chief, quoted Orbán as telling Zelensky that “members of the European Union are in continuous talks” concerning the subject of Ukraine’s EU integration.

NAVRACSICS: 2014-2020 EU FUNDING PROJECTS UNDER COMPLETION

Fully 95% of Hungary’s EU funding for the 2014-2020 budget period has been tapped so far, financing 52,000 projects, Tibor Navracsics, the regional development minister, told parliament’s economic affairs committee at a hearing on Monday. Hungary is a top performer in terms of successfully utilising funds, he said. In the last funding period, Hungary had 11.5 billion euros in resources, and, taking domestic co-financing into account, the EU framework amounted to 27 billion, he said. In addition, Hungary has been able to tap an additional 2.1 billion euros in aid up to 2025. The 2021-2027 EU funding period is also under way, he noted, and talks on cohesion funds and the support and loan parts of recovery funds started last year.

Last December, the European Commission endorsed the Hungarian operational programmes and the Council approved the use of the support part of the national

reconstruction plan, he added. Hungary and EC concluded the partnership agreement, ensuring cooperation for the financial period 2021-2027, paving the way for the utilisation and withdrawal of cohesion funds, the minister said. On Dec 8, the EU economy and finance ministers approved Hungary's plan, freeing up the loan part of the recovery fund, Navracsics said. In May, parliament adopted the legislative amendment in connection with EC concerns over the rule of law, and the EC asked the government to further clarify various issues in two rounds. The minister said he trusted the EC would acknowledge the answers and it would be possible to move forward and access the funds. As the EC has adopted Hungary's operative programmes and projects to be financed from the recovery fund during the period, the country "has managed to avoid losing funds and implementation of the operative programmes has started," he said. But concluding talks with the EC did not mean "an automatic access" to community funds "even if the political conditions have been settled". The EU has frozen 55% of the funding for three operative programmes "until the Hungarian government comes up with solutions that the EU finds reassuring," he said. The EU "came up with further questions and concerns" about six months ago, which "the government is trying to manage, but an agreement has not been reached yet," he said. Cohesion and recovery funds were crucial, he said, for the

country to narrow existing disparities, and the goal was to make optimum use of those funds to that end. The government will continue to use EU funds to "reduce the development differences" between various regions of Hungary, he said.

When it comes to university foundations and related EU funds, he noted the matter has been on the agenda since February, and the EC had come up with new demands. Hungarian students can participate in the Erasmus programme until September 2024. It was likely, he added, that an agreement may be reached ensuring that Hungarian students take part in mobility programmes thereafter, too. Navracsics said the European Parliament was putting political pressure on the EC, which complicated negotiations. Meanwhile, he said Hungary had begun tapping EU funds for the 2021-2027 period, and was outperforming other member states in drawing down the money. Addressing tasks ahead after Jan 1, Navracsics said state administration and local government tasks will be transferred to the public administration and regional development ministry.

TRUMP, HUNGARY AMBASSADOR ADDRESS NY YOUNG REPUBLICAN CLUB GALA IN MANHATTAN

Former US President Donald Trump and Hungarian Ambassador Szabolcs Takács were among the

guests addressing an annual gala dinner hosted jointly by a US and a Hungarian organisation in Manhattan on Saturday evening.

Addressing the event which was co-hosted by the New York Young Republican Club and Hungary's Center for Fundamental Rights, Trump said next year's ballot in the US would be more important than ever. The United States he said was facing a migration crisis much graver than in 2016. He accused the Biden administration of using government institutions "as a weapon" against its political opponents.

Takács said that under Trump's administration Washington had regarded Hungary a valued partner, a friend which Hungary would never forget. He praised joint achievements noting the conclusion of a bilateral defence cooperation. Commenting on international affairs, "Hungary will not yield to the globalists' pressure" and would seek ties with political leaders who respected their homeland, national sovereignty and the cause of the family, and who would stand up for their communities and ideals, Takács said. The gala was attended by around 1,000 guests including several members of the US Congress, conservative personalities as well as MEPs including Hungary's ruling Fidesz and Austria's Freedom Party.

MORE THAN 9,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SUNDAY

Fully 4,249 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Sunday, while 5,174 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 58 people, ORFK said on Monday.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MINISTER MEETS CONTINENTAL EXECUTIVES

Economic Development Minister Márton Nagy held talks with the executives of car parts supplier Continental in his office on Monday, and he made it clear that Hungarian jobs belonged to Hungarians, his ministry said. Nagy and Continental Automotive Hungary CEO Róbert Keszte and the company's other

leaders reviewed strategic trends in the economy, and specifically the car industry, touching on recent press reports concerning Continental. The minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to protecting families and jobs, saying businesses first had to offer job openings to Hungarians before employing other nationals.

Keszte said that contrary to the media reports, Continental's plant in Makó had yet to carry out any collective layoffs. He added, however, that the layoffs concerned the termination of temporary and fixed-term employment contracts as well as employees who are reaching retirement age. He said Continental provided more severance pay to its employees than what is required by law. He said the company was committed to observing the legal regulations and supported the amendments tightening the law on the employment of guest workers. Continental employs close to 8,000 people in Hungary.

HUNGARIANS WIN GOLD, 5 SILVER MEDALS AT INTERNATIONAL JUNIOR SCIENCE OLYMPIAD

The Hungarian team won one gold and five silver medals at the 20th International Junior Science Olympiad (IJSO) held for under-16s in Bangkok, Thailand, between December 1 and 10, the organisers said on Monday.

Artúr Bíró, a 10th-grade student of the Apáczai Csere János Secondary School in Budapest, won gold, and the other members of the team, Luca Nagy and Balázs Ábel Bauer of the Révai Miklós Secondary School in Győr, Tamás István Bense and Zoltán László Szepesi of the Eötvös József Secondary School in Budapest, and János Dániel Simon of Apáczai have won silver medals. The students were prepared by teachers of Apáczai, Attila Gyertyán, Bence Varga, Attila Villányi and Ádám Papp. The Hungarian team ranked 7th in the competition, tied with Australia. The competition drew 304 students from 54 countries this year.