

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Gingerbread village in Geresdlak, S Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

European Parliament holds plenary

Plenary session of parliament

Budapest Assembly meets

Stats office releases figures on industrial output in October

TOP STORY

NO DECISION ON UKRAINE EU ACCESSION TALKS

Despite the pressure that has been applied, the European Union's General Affairs Council did not make a decision on Tuesday on starting Ukraine's EU accession talks, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels.

Speaking at a press conference after the council's meeting, Szijjártó said the talks had mainly focused on the European Commission's enlargement package, adding that most member states had wanted there to be a decision on starting talks on Ukraine's EU accession. But no such decision was made, with the council acknowledging the EC's assessment, meaning that the decision will go before EU leaders at this week's summit, Szijjártó said. He noted that Hungary's stance on the matter was not a tactical one, arguing that the government believed the EU was not prepared for starting a "well-structured accession process guaranteeing mutual benefits" with Ukraine. The minister said it was clear that the EC had "no clue" how Ukraine's potential membership would affect the bloc and its member states. Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Hungary had succeeded in having planned steps against Serbia removed from the package, along with the planned freezing of community funds for Bosnia and Herzegovina's autonomous Serb Republic and steps that would have rendered accession talks with North Macedonia impossible.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: PRO- ENLARGEMENT COUNTRIES IN MINORITY IN EU

"Contrary to European or global public opinion, pro-enlargement countries are actually in the minority in the European Union today," Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after a meeting of the EU's General Affairs Council in Brussels. He lamented that the EU had not admitted a new member in ten years, that the bloc had not closed a single accession chapter with any of the candidate countries in six years, and that a new chapter was last opened two years ago. North Macedonia has been a candidate country since 2005 and Albania since 2014, but real accession talks have yet to begin, Szijjártó said. Montenegro, he added, has had candidate status since 2010, and it had been six years since an accession chapter with it had been closed. He also noted that Serbia had been a candidate country since 2012, but no real progress had been made in connection with its integration.

Szijjártó said this situation was the result of there always having been member states that had raised some sort of objection, blocked the process or were against making progress in those countries' accession. "And interestingly enough, these member states ... were never accused by anyone of being pro-Russia or pro-Putin, no one called them Kremlin propagandists and no one said they'd

end up on the wrong side of history," Szijjártó said.

He said that just as these member states had the right to express their opinion on enlargement, Hungary also had a right to apply a carefully considered approach, taking into consideration the interests of the EU, in connection with Ukraine. Szijjártó called for the urgent completion of the open accession chapters with Montenegro, starting the third chapter of talks with Serbia and opening the actual accession process with North Macedonia and Albania. The minister also reiterated Hungary's support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's, Georgia's and Moldova's EU integration aspirations.

FIDESZ: EUROPEAN LEADERS SHOULD REPRESENT EUROPEAN INTERESTS

It is time European leaders represented European interests instead of those of others, ruling Fidesz's communications director said on Tuesday in reaction to recent remarks by the US secretary of state on the war in Ukraine. In a video on Facebook, István Hollik played a clip of Antony Blinken saying that 90% of the United States' security assistance had been spent in the US, making it "a win-win that we need to continue". Hollik said it was "insensitive" of Blinken to talk about the war in Hungary's neighbouring country as a "win-win" when there were a hundred people dying in the conflict each day. He

added that Blinken's statement "also makes it clear that continuing the war is simply in America's financial interest". Meanwhile, "Europe's leadership is lying low" and echoing the United States' arguments without seeking the opinion of the people, and forcing war instead of peace, Hollik said. "That's why change is needed in Brussels," he said. "It's time European leaders finally represented European interests, and not the interests of others."

BÓKA: HUNGARY WON'T CHANGE ITS MIND ON UKRAINE EU ACCESSION

Hungary will not change its mind in connection with starting Ukraine's European Union accession talks and financial support for the country, the minister of EU affairs said on Tuesday. Hungary firmly believes that starting EU accession talks would be premature, János Bóka said on Facebook, adding that Hungary's position was based on principle. He said financial support for Ukraine needed to be provided outside the EU budget with contributions and "clear political guidance" from member states. "Linking the funds owed to the Hungarian people and support for Ukraine in any way is an attempt to blackmail Hungary, which the government rejects," Bóka said. The minister also said he had given an interview to Financial Times discussing the Hungarian government's position on Ukraine.

AGMIN WARNS UKRAINE ACCESSION COULD COMPROMISE LIVELIHOOD OF EUROPEAN FARMERS

Ukraine's accession to the European Union would compromise the livelihood of producers of other member states as "European farmers cannot compete with Ukrainian estates of hundreds of thousands of hectares owned by Western capitalists and which are governed by far less stringent regulations," Hungary's minister of agriculture said in Brussels late on Monday. Following a meeting of his EU counterparts, István Nagy said it was regrettable that the European Commission had not assessed the impact of Ukraine's possible EU entry, adding that Ukraine would be on track to receive 30% of common agricultural funds and other member states would see a significant reduction in their subsidies.

Nagy said the impacts of a possible Ukraine entry were now "tangible" for farmers in countries neighbouring it since "trade obstacles were removed and Ukraine has become a part of the internal market". Increased imports from Ukraine had led to difficulties, he said, and "EU members bordering Ukraine couldn't rely on help from the European Commission." The EU's import ban on Ukrainian produce was removed at harvest time, which "indicates total incompetence", he added. The minister said the EC was threatening Hungary, Poland, and

Slovakia with infringement procedures over their measures introduced in response to the EU's lifting the import ban, adding that Hungary had received notice of the impending procedure.

Concerning the meeting, Nagy said participants were not in agreement concerning a Commission proposal on new GMO technologies, and he noted the Hungarian government's position that more time was needed for a proper solution because "nothing must be allowed to jeopardise food security".

Decisions concerning such technologies, as well as determining what kind of crops should be produced and distributed, were "issues of national sovereignty", the minister said, adding that "consumers are entitled to know what they buy and what they eat".

Concerning a proposal on reducing pesticides, Nagy said "mandatory reductions introduced under the lawnmower principle ... as well as prohibitions affecting other sensitive areas" would seriously endanger food security in Europe. The proposal, he said, was "irresponsible and unacceptable". "It isn't necessary to make new rules ... for goals that can be met under effective regulations and through existing practices," he said. "Farming should be left to Europe's farmers."

Meanwhile, the minister said his counterparts supported a proposal on precisely labelling the origin of honey produce on jars. "It will be easier for buyers to find high quality Hungarian

honey produce ... and support not only Hungarian bee keepers but the preservation of biodiversity," Nagy said. Indicating the origin of the product will also help "action against honey of dubious origin imported from third countries," he added.

PARLT VOTES TO SET UP SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION OFFICE

Lawmakers on Tuesday approved the law on protecting national sovereignty that paves the way for establishing the Sovereignty Protection Office. The bill submitted by ruling party MPs was passed with 140 votes in favour and 50 against. According to the law's preamble, unlawful attacks against Hungary's sovereignty are becoming increasingly common, with foreign entities attempting to gain influence in Hungary to enforce their own interests against those of Hungary. The preamble cites the millions of US dollars in campaign donations received by the left-wing opposition ahead of the 2022 general election.

The bill says that political forces dependent on foreign entities gaining power would harm Hungary's sovereignty and pose a national security risk. It says it is necessary to set up an independent body uncovering foreign influence operations, as well as to introduce criminal sanctions for accepting foreign campaign donations. The Sovereignty Protection Office will be established in line with a constitutional amendment proposal

approved by MPs on Tuesday (with 135 votes in favour, 34 against and 6 abstentions). The new autonomous state administration authority will be involved in assessment activities and making proposals. It will be tasked with investigating organisations whose activities funded from abroad may influence the outcome of the elections.

The head of the office will be appointed by the President of the Republic at the proposal of the prime minister for a six-year term, starting on February 1, 2024. The office's task is to analyse information submitted by organisations under investigation with a view to determining whether national sovereignty is enforced, and to recommend measures and legislation aimed at protecting Hungary's sovereignty. The office will also carry out and finance research activities.

The office will have to compile an annual sovereignty report by June 30 which includes a sovereignty risk analysis. Its tasks also include uncovering any interest representation or disinformation activity carried out in the interest of other states or foreign organisations, as well as activities aiming to influence decision-making by the state and society. It will also be responsible for identifying and investigating organisations that receive support from abroad for the purpose of influencing the elections. The Penal Code has also been amended, stating that a candidate or member of the organisation nominating them that made use of foreign money or gained a financial advantage by concealing

the origin of the prohibited foreign funding is criminally liable and faces up to three years in prison.

ORBÁN DISCUSSES BULGARIA TRANSIT TARIFFS WITH BORISOV

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on Tuesday talked with former Bulgarian prime minister Boyko Borisov over the phone, and discussed Bulgarian transit fees on LNG. Borisov told Orbán there had been an inter-party agreement on "complying with Hungary's determined request and abolishing the punitive tariff on gas transit, which poses a serious threat to Hungary's energy security". Orbán and Borisov also discussed Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen Area. Bulgaria has fulfilled all conditions to the move, which is of primary importance to the country, Havasi cited Borisov as saying.

GULYÁS PAYS TRIBUTE TO LATE PM ANTALL

Gergely Gulyás, the head of the Prime Minister's Office, on Tuesday attended a conference marking the 30th anniversary of the death of József Antall, Hungary's first prime minister after the democratic transition of 1989.

At the conference held in Parliament, Gulyás referred to Antall as a "selfless statesman" for whom "service was more important than his own life".

Antall had a significant role in ensuring that "the democratic transition did not involve compromises

or bloodshed", and his efforts contributed to "Hungary achieving full freedom", Gulyás said. Antall and his government were instrumental in restoring Hungary's sovereignty by pulling out of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, while they "defined the cornerstones of Hungary's policy embracing all Hungarians ... taking constitutional responsibility for ethnic Hungarians and making Europe recognise ethnic minority rights as human rights," Gulyás said. The Antall government also paved the way for Hungary's European Union and NATO integration, Gulyás said. "As Europe looks today, we have reason to be sad, yet there is no alternative to institutionalised European cooperation; it's true, however, that that option appeared more attractive in Antall's time," he added.

KARÁCSONY PROPOSES AIRPORT EXPRESSWAY TO BE NAMED AFTER EX- PM ANTALL

Budapest Mayor Gerely Karácsony has proposed naming Budapest's airport expressway after former Prime Minister József Antall. Karacsony said on Facebook on Tuesday that the first prime minister of post-Communist transformation died 30 years ago, on December 12. Budapest already has a public space named after the first president of post-Communist transformation, so "it would be fair to have one named after the first prime minister, too", he added. Karácsony said

the so-far unnamed expressway for Liszt Ferenc International was one of the most important roads in the city and it will undergo a revamp in the near future.

FIDESZ: OPPOSITION LEFT STILL SERVING FOREIGN INTERESTS FOR DOLLARS

Noting a vote on the sovereignty protection law on Tuesday, the ruling Fidesz party issued a statement saying that left-wing parties had vowed to vote against it ahead of time, and this showed they still represented foreign interests for dollars. Fidesz said it was illegal for parties to accept foreign financing. The new law goes further and makes foreign campaign financing a crime with a potential prison sentence. "This closes the loopholes for the left's trickery", the statement said. It added that the left had received millions of foreign dollars for their 2022 election campaign, funnelled through Ferenc Gyurcsány, the leader of the Democratic Coalition, and Gergely Karácsony, the mayor of Budapest. "This amounts to political corruption, foreign interference in Hungarian elections, and an illegal attack on Hungary's sovereignty," Fidesz's statement said. "We will protect Hungary's sovereignty."

JOBBIK-CONSERVATIVES CALLS FOR SETTING UP FUND TO PROTECT HUNGARIAN JOBS

The opposition Jobbik-Conservatives has called for a fund to be established

to protect the jobs of Hungarians, a party lawmaker said on Tuesday. Artificial intelligence is set to gain ground and "Hungary is not prepared for the challenge", Dániel Z Kárpát told a press conference. The "uncontrolled spread of AI" would, he said, result in the disappearance of Hungarian jobs in various fields. Some 37% of jobs in Hungary were under the shadow of digitalisation and AI, he added. Kárpát said affected employees would be left stranded, so his party was calling on the government to set up a job protection fund. "Large companies that profit greatly from AI should be forced to channel some of their extra profits into a job protection fund," he said. He added that Hungary should not wait for the EU in this respect because AI regulations on the continent would not be ready until 2025.

DK: NUCLEAR PLANT UPGRADE 'UNNECESSARY'

The opposition Democratic Coalition opposes to the construction of the two new blocks at the Paks nuclear plant, the party's deputy leader told a press conference on Tuesday. László Varju insisted that according to a statement from the plant's director, an extension of the already existing blocks' lifespan would make new blocks obsolete. "The director basically said that Hungary does not need the Paks II blocks which would be built by Russians," Varju said. Varju called for the development of wind, solar and geothermal energy

production and a nationwide home reconstruction programme to cut down on energy use, "rather than spending Hungarian taxpayers' money on expensive nuclear reactors built from Russian loans."

BIRD FLU IDENTIFIED IN N AND S HUNGARY

The national food chain safety office (Nébih) has confirmed the presence of a highly pathogenic bird flu virus in the county of Komárom-Esztergom, in northern Hungary, and in Békés County, a county hitherto free of the virus in the south-east. The stocks in question, 51,400 turkeys in the north of the country where H5N1 was identified and 7,500 geese in the south, are in the process of being destroyed and an epidemiological investigation is under way, Nébih said on Tuesday. A protection zone with a radius of 3km apply around the farms as well as a 10km observation zone.

SOME 7,500 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON MONDAY

Fully 4,294 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Monday, while 3,206 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 30 people, ORFK said on Tuesday.

CENTRE FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE OPENS IN BUDAPEST

A complex of a model home and education centre for autistic people and their families opened in Budapest's 13th district on Tuesday. Anikó Nagy, director of the National Heim Pál Paediatric Institute, welcomed the inauguration of the new facility. She said the model home aimed to provide an "ideal space" for families with an autistic member. The conference area of the facility will offer training courses for parents as well as conferences for experts in the field, she added.

Szilvia Szijjártó-Nagy, the head of the Together for Autistic People Foundation, said her foundation had collected donations for several years to build an Autistic Model House, which opened in the spring of last year, and the new complex. She said autism affected one in 15 Hungarian families, adding that "a multitude of people around us are struggling to support an autistic family member, meeting their special needs in everyday situations." The foundation

also aims to educate society about autism, she added. István Szelecski, a senior therapist at the Autistic Model House Diagnostic and Therapy Centre, said the model home was designed to "present an ideal environment in which tension and anxiety could be reduced so that both children and parents have a relaxed time." The new facility offers families an opportunity to teach autistic children how to use everyday appliances in their home. Families applying for a course will move into the facility for a week, and receive counselling by experts, he added. Since the Autistic Model House was opened in 2002, it has received over 1,400 requests for a diagnosis and has offered treatment to nearly 900 autistic children. Currently, 70 children are provided a complex therapy.

2024 SZIGET FESTIVAL TO FEATURE FRED AGAIN, SAM SMITH, BIG THIEF

Organisers of next year's Sziget Festival in Budapest on Tuesday announced 40 performers expected to attend the event, including Fred

Again, Martin Garrix, Sam Smith, Stormzy, Louis Tomlinson and Big Thief. Chief organiser Tamás Kádár said early sales indicated "huge interest", adding like previous years, the festival would feature "international stars and newly discovered talent". A concert by alternative electronic music Artur and Batish (Artbat), pop/nudisco group L'Imperatrice, Crystal Fighters, Richie Hawtin, techno pioneer Honey Dijon, and Australia's Dom Dolla will also be among the festival highlights, the statement said. Amsterdam's ANOTR, Welsh Tom and Ed Russell, British Nia Archives, Eris Drew and Octo Octa, and Hamburg's Meute will be further features on the programme, alongside with Grandson, Liberato, Zoe Wees, Joker Out, Yard Act, Joesef, Warhaus, Argy, and Ellen Allien. Britain's urban punk duo Nova Twins, Dutch rapper Joost, Blondshell from Los Angeles and Wednesday, as well as West African dj and producer Amene, Norwegian pop star Dagny and Dutch indie performer Pip Blom will also be included in next year's festival programme.