

PHOTO OF THE DAY



President Katalin Novák taking calls for public media's "Good to be Good" charity campaign

UPCOMING EVENTS

Stats office publishes Jan-Nov demography figures

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

HUNGARY'S POSITION 'ABOUT FUTURE OF EUROPE'

Hungary cannot be bribed or blackmailed because it has its own position that is about the future of Europe, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in an interview with French news channel LCI.

Hungary's "very principled position", Szijjártó said, was that European Union accession talks should only start with countries that are prepared and only if the EU itself was prepared. "And we don't see either of these two when it comes to Ukraine," he added. The minister said Hungary had often been accused of using its position on Ukraine as a tactic to gain access to the EU funds that have been withheld from the country, but this was not the case. Hungary's position, he said, was that the European Commission had not prepared the issues concerning Ukraine properly. He noted that the Hungarian government had condemned Russia's war against Ukraine on multiple occasions and stood by Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Szijjártó said Hungary was "absolutely in favour" of tighter and more effective cooperation between the EU and Ukraine and was arguing in favour of a discussion among EU member states on the bloc's strategic vision concerning the future of the relationship between the EU and Ukraine.

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SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY NOT INFLUENCED BY POSITIONS OF OTHER EU MEMBER STATES

Commenting on the suggestion that the Hungarian government was in the minority in the European Union with its stance on Ukraine's accession talks, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in an interview with French news channel LCI that Hungary was not influenced by the positions of other member states because it respected those positions and wanted its own position to be respected as well. He said there were certain issues in the EU that required unanimity. "And as long as there's no unanimity, there's no decision."

Asked about relations between Hungary and Russia, Szijjártó said the country had a very rational cooperation with Russia on energy, adding that energy security was in Hungary's national interest. And energy security, he added, was determined by infrastructure. If gas flows from Russia towards Hungary were interrupted, it would be physically impossible to guarantee Hungary's energy supply, the minister said, adding that no one could expect Hungary to render its own energy security impossible. Asked if Moscow could threaten EU member states after Ukraine, Szijjártó said he did not believe that Russia would attack a NATO member, noting that most EU countries were also part of NATO. He argued that NATO was the

world's strongest security and defence alliance and its Article 5 declared that an attack on one member was considered an attack on the whole alliance. Asked how it was possible that Hungary today was the EU member with the closest ties with Russia after Soviet tanks had "crushed Hungarian freedom" in the 1950s and occupied Hungary, Szijjártó said that Hungary had suffered under communism for 40 years. "There was an oppression by the East and a kind of negligence by the West," he said. "We fought for our freedom but no one helped us," the minister said, adding that no one should lecture Hungary on history, freedom or sovereignty. "The other issue is that we do believe that if we block the channels of communication with Russia, then we kill the hope for peace," he said. "Because we want peace to come."

Asked about the role of European right-wing "sovereignist" political forces, Szijjártó said the EU could not be strengthened on the path of federalisation, arguing that federalisation and the establishment of a "united states of Europe" would only weaken the bloc, while a community of sovereign states strengthened it.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY TO VETO BULGARIA'S SCHENGEN MEMBERSHIP IF 'PUNITIVE TARIFF' ON GAS TRANSIT MAINTAINED

Hungary has made it clear to Bulgaria that it will veto the country's Schengen

membership if a "punitive tariff" on gas transits is maintained by Bulgaria in the long term, the foreign minister said. Péter Szijjártó said on Facebook on Saturday that Bulgaria's move was "scandalous and hostile" because it endangered gas transfers to North Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary. As a result of the current geopolitical and security circumstances, a major part of natural gas supplies required by Hungary arrive through the affected pipeline and Bulgaria's decision "goes fully against European regulations," he said. "It carries the risk of natural gas deliveries to, among others, Hungary, stopping completely," he said. Szijjártó said that a decision on Bulgaria's Schengen membership is scheduled to be made next week, "so they have suddenly started making efforts to scrap the law". "If they cancel it, we will also withdraw our decision concerning the veto," he added.

PM'S PRESS CHIEF: HUNGARY SUPPORTED EXTRA FUNDING FOR MIGRATION

At the European Union summit this week, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán voted in support of extra funding for migration in the EU budget and continues to support it, the prime minister's press chief said on Facebook on Saturday. Bertalan Havasi reacted to French President Emmanuel Macron's remarks concerning a 50 billion euro aid package for Ukraine. Macron said that Orbán's decision on Thursday to block

the package was “dishonest” because the decision also raised obstacles to the use of funding for managing migration. “It was a long evening, and the French president obviously does not remember it correctly,” Havasi said.

PM’S POLICY DIRECTOR: EU DIVIDED ON UKRAINE ACCESSION

The matter of Ukraine’s European Union accession has not been settled, and all that is certain is that there is no longer unity on this issue within the EU, the prime minister’s policy director told public radio on Sunday. Hungary made it clear at this week’s summit of EU leaders that it disagrees with Ukraine’s EU membership and considers any start to accession talks to be premature, unjustified and not properly prepared, Balázs Orbán said. But the other 26 member states insisted that a positive message had to be sent to Ukraine and pointed out that accession talks would take a long time, he added. Orbán said there were at least 75 occasions that would require unanimity and therefore Hungary’s support in order for the process to move forward, and Hungary’s parliament would also have to approve it. Hungary, he said, had voiced its disagreement and let the other 26 member states make the decision. Orbán said the EU’s founding treaty made it clear that the bloc could only be enlarged with the agreement of member states, adding that Hungary’s right could not be restricted beyond a certain point by any procedural

rule. He said the discourse had been about the seven criteria the EU had set for Ukraine in order for it to receive candidate country status of which the European Commission says it had only fulfilled four, while Hungary says it had not fulfilled any. Orbán said this meant progress on the accession talks was untimely.

As regards the EU budget, he said Hungary’s stance was that the budget did not need to be amended because every issue could be managed outside the framework of the budget or by diverting funds within it. Hungary is prepared to discuss the issue but had its set of terms, he said, noting that Hungary did not want “Hungarians’ money to be given to Ukraine” and called for a strategic debate on Ukraine’s financing. As regards the EU recovery monies, he ruled out Hungary’s contribution to the higher interest burdens until the country gained access to the funds it was entitled to. Orbán also said the proposed changes to the EU budget also concerned migration and additional funding to improve Europe’s economic competitiveness, noting Hungary had indicated that it agreed with multiple points of the proposal.

SZIJJÁRTÓ CONGRATULATES POLISH COUNTERPART ON APPOINTMENT

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Friday congratulated Radosław Sikorski on his appointment as Poland’s new

foreign minister. Following a phone call with Sikorski, Szijjártó said on Facebook that they “see eye to eye on more things than we would have thought”. “I wished him much success since the success of brotherly Poland is in the interest of Hungary,” Szijjártó said. Both parties consider the Visegrad Group as instrumental in promoting shared national interests, Szijjártó said, adding that they were also in agreement concerning the importance of border control. “We also agreed that the rights of national minorities should be respected as a European value to be maintained in all circumstances,” Szijjártó said. According to the Facebook post, Sikorski accepted an invitation for an official visit to Hungary.

PRESIDENT NOVÁK ASSISTS PUBLIC MEDIA’S ANNUAL CHARITY CAMPAIGN

President Katalin Novák visited the public media call centre on Sunday to take charity phone calls for the annual “Good to be Good” charity campaign. This year’s campaign is raising money for the Semmelweis University Foundation to support the development of premature babies. Novák said on Facebook that donors could bid for the coronation plate she received from King Charles III and Queen Camilla when she attended the coronation ceremony this year. A donation of 500 forints can be contributed by dialling the phone number 13600, extension 04, or by texting 04 to the same number.

MI HAZÁNK TO FIELD MAYORAL CANDIDATE IN ALL BUDAPEST DISTRICTS

Opposition party Mi Hazánk on Saturday said it will field a mayoral candidate in every district of Budapest in next year's local council elections. Dóra Dúró, the party's deputy leader, said Mi Hazánk was the only opposition party that would run a mayoral candidate of its own in all 23 of the capital's districts. "We're not deciding on our mayoral candidates in smoke-filled rooms together with other parties," Dúró told a press conference. She said her party's pick of its candidates offered a "third way in Hungarian public life". Dúró underlined that Mi Hazánk would not run a joint candidate either with any of the left-liberal parties or ruling Fidesz in any electoral district, or support any other party's candidate. She also said her party's campaigns would be financed from state support and its candidates' own money rather than "dollars coming from America".

András Grundtner, Mi Hazánk's candidate for Budapest mayor, said the party only accepted "real patriots" and was especially proud of its candidates.

LMP SUPPORTS UKRAINE'S EU ACCESSION, WOULD AMEND AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

LMP supports Ukraine's European Union accession as a long-term

strategic goal but it would amend the system of EU agricultural subsidies in order to preserve sustainability, a national board member of the opposition party said on Saturday. Mária Szendefy told an online press conference that LMP also insisted on maintaining the EU's GMO free status. She said Ukraine's EU accession in due time would be a welcome development for ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia because it would result in more transparent borders and direct links with Hungary. In terms of geopolitical aspects and security policy, it would also be better for Hungary to have another neighbour that is an EU member, she added. At the same time, she said Ukraine's agriculture was ruled by mostly US large investors farming areas of several thousand hectares. Since EU agricultural policy supports farmers depending on the size of their agricultural land, with Ukraine's accession support to all other countries would be much less than what Ukraine would be eligible for, she added. As a result, new EU regulations are needed, giving priority to smaller farms, she said. Large farms should be allowed to succeed on fully market-based conditions, in certain cases with protective duties, she added. Szendefy said it was a basic requirement that the EU must remain GMO-free and she condemned attempts to loosen the current strict regulations.

DK TO ASK CHIEF PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, INTERIOR MINISTER ABOUT OIL CONTAMINATION SOUTH OF BUDAPEST

The opposition Democratic Coalition will ask the chief public prosecutor and the interior minister about who is responsible for a case of oil contamination in Szigetszentmiklós, south of Budapest, three years ago, the party's shadow minister for environmental protection said on Sunday. Olivio Kocsis-Cake told a joint press conference with Éva Kocsis, DK's mayoral candidate for Szigetszentmiklós, that in December 2020 several thousand litres of waste oil had been released in a sub-channel of the River Danube in an area with Natura 2000 environmental protection ranking. As a result, the environment was severely damaged on an area of 1,800 square metres, he added. Kocsis-Cake said it was "appalling" that nobody was held accountable for the oil contamination while it cost several hundred million forints to clear the area. The party will ask Chief Public Prosecutor Péter Polt why the culprit had not been found, he said. Kocsis said the party's parliamentary group would also ask the interior minister in writing, adding that she was determined to reveal who was responsible in order to prevent that any such act is left without a consequence in the future.

MORE THAN 10,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 6,311 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 4,047 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 41 people, ORFK said on Sunday.

FITCH AFFIRMS HUNGARY'S INVESTMENT GRADE RATING

Fitch Ratings affirmed Hungary's 'BBB' investment-grade sovereign rating at a scheduled review on Friday. Fitch left its negative outlook on the rating unchanged. "Hungary's ratings are supported by strong structural indicators relative to 'BBB' peers, investment-fuelled economic growth and solid net FDI inflows," Fitch said. In a statement issued after the rating

action, the Economic Development Ministry said the affirmation was "another reassuring sign" following an affirmation of Hungary's sovereign rating by Standard & Poor's a week earlier. All of the big rating agencies put Hungary in the investment grade category, it added.

Finance Minister Mihály Varga said on Facebook on Saturday that in spite of the ongoing crisis caused by the war, credit rating agencies Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings had both affirmed Hungary's investment-grade sovereign rating within the same week. In the video, Varga cited Fitch as projecting high growth for Hungary and that the government will continue to reduce the budget deficit and the public debt and to push down inflation. The minister said Fitch had acknowledged the stability of the country's banking sector and the growing role of the private sector in debt financing. "The analysis also points out that the country remains an attractive investment destination," Varga said. "So Hungary closes out the year getting investment grade status

from all three rating agencies and being rated two grades higher than at the beginning of the decade."

PRESIDENT MARKS DAY OF HUNGARIAN ARCHITECTURE

The works of Hungarian architects show that Hungary is a modern country and Hungarians are modern people who respect their traditions and are capable of creating something that is world class while being uniquely Hungarian, President Katalin Novák said at an award ceremony on Saturday to mark the Day of Hungarian Architecture. Hungarian architecture reflects the relationship with the past, the focus of the present, "and whether we are open to the world", Novák told the ceremony in Pesti Vigadó. This, she added, came in the form of works that could hold their own anywhere in the world. Saturday's ceremony was held to present state architectural awards as well as the inaugural Károly Kós Lifetime Achievement Award which was given to Sándor Dévényi.