

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán giving an international press conference in Budapest

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

**Stats office releases 2nd estimate on foreign trade in Oct 2023**

## TOP STORY

# ORBÁN: FAMILIES TO BE IN FOCUS IN 2024

The goal in 2024 is to return the focus of politics to families after a year of "great struggles", the prime minister told an international press briefing.

If Hungarians spent 2023 "struggling and working to protect what they had", the government hopes that the country will be working to take a step forward in 2024, Viktor Orbán said, adding that 2023 had been a year of "great struggles", noting the challenges of the war, the growing threat of terrorism, migration, inflation "and Brussels". He said the government's goal concerning each of these struggles had been clear: Hungary had to stay out of the war, keep the heightened threat of terrorism outside the country, curb migration, push down inflation, and reach a deal with Brussels "despite the constant impedance". Orbán said the government had accomplished its goals when it came to addressing inflation, the war, migration and the threat of terrorism. Families had also struggled this year because the war had brought with it sanctions and rising energy prices, which had endangered the value of pensions and wages, he said, noting that the government had succeeded in protecting the value of pensions, while wages would also be protected to a greater extent than had appeared mid-year.

## **ORBÁN OUTLINES GOVT SUPPORT MEASURES**

After reaching 4-5% earlier this year, the decline in real wages is set to be pushed under 1% by year-end, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán told an international press briefing. Detailing the government's support measures, Orbán noted the revamped home purchase subsidy scheme, saying the government trusted that the CSOK Plusz programme would help tens of thousands of families. He also noted a recent agreement between employers and employees under which minimum wages would be raised by 10 and 15%, respectively. The prime minister also said the government guaranteed to preserve the value of pensions, adding that the purchasing power of pensions could even increase in the wake of lower-than-expected inflation.

Meanwhile, the prime minister said the European parliamentary elections would be at the centre of next year's political goals. He said the general view in Hungary was that "the bureaucrats in Brussels live in a bubble", that "Brussels is blind", and could not see "real life". Moreover, it ignored the problems that people struggled with, both in Hungary and in the whole of Europe, he added. Orbán said the goal of the 2024 EP election therefore was to "open the eyes of Brussels, make them see reality and make European leaders capable of correcting the mistakes that they made in 2023". Hungary, he added, would try to achieve a

significant political turnaround in the EP elections.

On the subject of teachers' pay, Orbán announced the launch of a three-year scheme to increase the salaries of school and kindergarten teachers that would see their average salary rise by 32.2% from January. He said the preconditions for the programme were "about to be met", adding, however, that Hungary must first receive a letter from Brussels "confirming they will cover a certain part of the pay hike." He said the government had a plan in place for steps to be taken once the letter arrived. He said the pay rise would be the first component in a three-year plan, to be followed by "smaller but still significant" hikes in 2025 and 2026, after which teachers' average pay would reach 800,000 forints (EUR 2,080). Orbán said teachers' salaries could vary based on their performance and geographical location.

## **ORBÁN: NEW EU MIGRATION PACT 'SURE TO FAIL'**

On the topic of migration, the prime minister said at his year-end press conference that the new migration pact agreed on by the European Union was "certain to fail". Viktor Orbán said that until the EU declared, as Hungary had, that anyone who wanted to enter the bloc's territory must submit an application to do so and wait outside the EU's borders for their request to be assessed, any package that was

introduced would fail. Orbán said he was convinced that Hungary's way of regulating migration could be taken as a "model" as the only one across Europe that had been proven to work, adding that "Brussels shouldn't be attacking it".

Regarding the recent EU summit, Orbán noted that he had tried to persuade the other member states over eight hours not to start accession talks with Ukraine as "that would be a mistake". Whereas Hungary did not "want the role of a Cassandra", he said he could not say for sure what would happen, adding that Hungary had met the same kind of opposition in the EU over the issue of migration, which had then caused "great trouble" in Europe. If Hungary persisted in holding the line after many years that Ukrainian accession was "not good", then the Hungarian parliament would still have a decision ahead of it, and its approval ultimately would be required to ratify it. He added that a more realistic option, a strategic partnership, should be offered to Ukraine.

On the subject of the public finances, Orbán said it was possible to provide financial support outside of the EU budget. Orbán said Hungary's goal was not to "block things or to say no, but to say yes," so that good decisions could be taken in Brussels. He said supporting Ukraine within the EU budget was not a good decision, as doing so may endanger other sections of the budget, such as funding earmarked for Hungary. Concerning EU aid for Ukraine, the prime minister said:

"This does not depend on whether the EU releases the funds payable to Hungary." "The EU's formula to punish Hungarian children through the Erasmus programme, when they have a problem with the country, is far from the Hungarian spirit ... we consider this petty and we will not do anything of the kind; we will not couple things of a different nature," he said. "An agreement on Ukraine will not follow when Hungary receives money but when the proposal in itself makes sense," Orbán said, adding the most important requirement was that aid for Ukraine "must come from outside the budget and should not be linked to other budgetary issues." The EU budget, he added, was appropriate and "it would cause problems if we touched it ... we won't ask for anything else; just that the budget should be implemented." Money for Hungary was included in the EU budget and those funds were "due". "But if they start changing the budget, Hungarian interests will be present and we will negotiate accordingly." The prime minister noted that Hungary had called for a ceasefire in Ukraine, regardless of any post-war settlement. After that, he said, time must be allowed to develop the framework for peace negotiations. "If Europe does not start negotiations, there's a risk that Russia could come to an agreement with the United States and leave the Europeans out of it," he said. Orbán said it was important for Hungary not to share a border with Russia. "There should always be ... a state in between. That has so far

been Ukraine," he said, adding that Hungary would not consent to being drawn into the war. "We do not want to be part of an alliance with a country that is currently fighting a war on its eastern border," he said, indicating that this was position was shared by NATO. He said Ukraine's NATO membership would mean that Hungary would have to send troops to Ukraine the very next day.

Concerning an invitation by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Orbán said they had been "swept together" at the inauguration ceremony of the Argentinian president in Buenos Aires, where Zelensky "offered talks and I accepted". But first, topics should be clarified in preparatory talks between the two countries' foreign ministers, he said. On the subject of Ukraine's EU membership, EU ministers must first come to an agreement, he added. Regarding the EU summit next February, he said that two issues on the agenda could be taken separately: one was EU financial support for Ukraine and the other a request by individual member states for independent budget changes. Concerning the proposed aid for Ukraine, Orbán said: "Twenty-six member states support giving 50 billion euros to Ukraine over four years, a sum which we do not currently have, so the community would have to take out a loan as part of the seven-year budget framework." He said it was important to identify a "meaningful timeframe" for the aid to be forwarded, since "we have no

idea what will happen in a quarter of a year". The aid should be "tied to America's commitment" because "commitments of an uncertain magnitude could unravel our own budget". Alternatively, each member state could contribute "in proportion to their GDP", he suggested. "We don't want to take out a loan in cooperation with anyone," Orbán said. "We don't want to make the same mistake as with the recovery fund. The pandemic is over, yet several member states have not received funds due to them." "It isn't sensible to borrow money in cooperation with other countries while we're in a political dispute with those very countries," the prime minister said. Regarding initiatives for other amendments to the EU budget, Orbán said that if such a process started, "Hungary will do the same". "This is ahead of us and will become clear in the next month," he said.

Asked whether Hungarians in Transcarpathia would be better off if Ukraine became member of the EU, Orbán said: "Yes, that can be done in a way that they will be better off". The fact that former Ukrainian president Poroshenko was not allowed to leave his country because he was reported to be on his way to meet the Hungarian prime minister, Orbán said he was more forgiving than public opinion as he recognised that Ukraine was at war and must enforce extraordinary rules. "I have no word of criticism on this: if the Ukrainian state believes that someone's departure from the territory of the country poses

a risk to national security, they must act accordingly". At the same time, Orbán suggested that "if a Ukrainian citizen meeting a Hungarian prime minister carries a national security risk, how does Ukraine mean to become a member of the EU?"

## **ORBÁN: EU HAS GIVEN HUNGARY FRESH BILL OF HEALTH**

Answering a question about whether Hungary was threatened under the Article 7 procedure, Viktor Orbán dismissed its significance, noting the procedure had been initiated long ago. The current procedure, the prime minister said, was not aimed at taking away any rights from Hungary. In any case, stripping a member state of its right to vote could be initiated under the EU Treaty only if there was a persistent threat of the violation of the rule of law, he added. The European Commission, he noted, had just declared that Hungary's judicial system in compliance with EU norms, adding that "Hungary has the most freshly assessed and best judicial system in the entire European Union; we have just received a document that is proof of it." Far from being pushed towards the end-goal of the Article 7 procedure, it has become obvious that there was no reason to initiate such a procedure, he said.

Regarding EU funding, Orbán said it was generally recognised that Hungary had been "blackmailed in Brussels", and the blackmailers were members of the

European parliament. Orbán said there was "not much we can do about that". Hungary, he added, complied with all requirements regarding the rule of law and was cooperative. Whenever the Commission had specific requests, Hungary would implement "almost everything", he said. "In this situation of blackmail, Hungary will do everything in its power to assert its interests," Orbán added.

Regarding the EP election, he said Fidesz MEPs were in talks with the European conservatives but they would not give up their status as independent MEPs until after the election. Orbán said "things are going unbearably badly in Brussels" as there was no peace along the borders of the EU and the European economy was not getting stronger. "Our plan is to join forces with the right wing that is now becoming stronger in Europe and create sufficient attraction on the centre right," thus achieving a different kind of migration, economic and foreign policy, he said.

Regarding the Hungarian 2024 EU presidency, the prime minister said Hungary would largely assume an intermediary role. "How we can protect our national interests, too, is a difficult question," he added.

Concerning Visegrad Group cooperation, Orbán said it was "sad" that it had fallen apart, partly due to internal divergences and partly due to external pressure. There is a chance, he said, that in February, during the Czech presidency, there would be a meeting of V4 prime ministers, where

they could reconsider whether central European strategy still had any viability amid the changed circumstances. He noted that the V4 was created with the aim of not having a Franco-Germany axis decide all important matters in Europe, but for central Europe, too, to have weight, importance and a voice.

Asked about migration pressure seen on the Hungarian-Slovak border in recent months, Orbán rejected the suggestion that there had been any fluctuations in the quality of the protection of the southern border in recent months. "We are doing as much as we can," he said, adding that soldiers, police and border guards only deserved words of appreciation for what they were doing to protect the border.

Regarding his recent meeting in China with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Orbán said it was a "coincidence of intentions". He dismissed press reports that he had been unable to avoid the meeting. Orbán said he never acted under pressure in foreign policy but represented the sovereign Hungarian state. Asked about whether he had plans for a bilateral meeting with Putin, he said neither party had any intention for bilateral talks.

On the ratification of Sweden's NATO accession, he said: "There is no Turkish-Hungarian agreement", adding that the two countries would make a decision on the matter independently of one another. He noted that Hungarian MPs were "not very keen on the decision". This, he said, was because when the Hungarian parliament approved

Finland's accession, the very next day, the Finnish government took the Hungarian government to court in the EU on a different matter.

Asked about Israel and the Oct 7 terrorist attack, Orbán said Hungary had been one of the few countries in the EU that said, based on the specific situation in question, that Israel had a right to defend itself and do everything possible to prevent a repeat of such a situation. He said Israel's stability was in Hungary and Europe's fundamental security interest. He indicated that differences had narrowed during a debate at the recent EU summit, and there was a chance that, sooner or later, there would be a pan-European position considering Israel's stability as a strategic issue. In response to a question, Orbán said sending money to "registered terrorist organisations" from the EU budget was a "capital offence". He said an investigation would also be undertaken to determine whether humanitarian, education or other forms of financial aid had made their way to terrorist groups.

As regards the Colorado Supreme Court's decision to disqualify former US President Donald Trump from the Republican primary ballot, Orbán said Hungary had no say in the functioning of the US justice system, and only asked "respectfully that they urgently stop lecturing us". Meanwhile, he underscored the importance of the amendment of Ukraine's minority law, saying minority protection regulations were pointless if the relevant legal

practices were not solidified. Orbán said Hungary was studying the new law and did not want to underestimate its worth, but proposed that Ukraine restore the minority law it "took away" from ethnic Hungarians in 2015.

Meanwhile, the prime minister advised caution concerning the assistance Hungary could offer ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia, citing "sensitivities regarding good neighbourly relations". He said ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia formed "an extremely strong community" but were incapable of demonstrating that strength when it came to political representation. "This is something they have to be the ones to resolve," he added. Orbán said Hungary-Slovakia relations were at an all-time high, adding he trusted that the new Slovak government would be more sensitive and open to the needs of the Hungarian minority.

Meanwhile, Orbán said that Hungary was making quick progress towards energy self-sufficiency, arguing that the completion of the upgrade of the Paks nuclear plant would mean that by 2030-2032, nuclear energy would account for 60% of domestic electricity consumption, with 30-35% being covered by solar power and the rest by fossil fuels. Most of these resources today, he said, went towards energy production upgrades, noting that gas-fired power plants "must be built behind solar farms".

Asked about the state purchase of Budapest's international airport, Orbán said: "We're at the end of the

process ... an announcement could be coming any day now," adding that the purchase was complete and there were only technical details left to sort out. Orbán said there was fierce competition for tourism, conference tourism and international organisations. "Everyone wants to be part of this, and the key question here is air transport in which Hungary has had a big disadvantage in the recent period because it hasn't even entered into the competition," the prime minister said. He said it was "impossible to reach the top" in this sector without state involvement, noting that the government had found a French partner to operate the airport, "and we'll be happy if it can bring in other investors."

Asked about hospital debt, Orbán said Hungarian health care was neither public nor private, and this was a "problem". The government, he added, wanted to keep the single state insurance model and was moving towards more regulated state health care without banning private health care altogether. He said it was unclear why a surgical procedure in one hospital was priced differently than in another. To speed the process up, director-general positions and the role of hospital directors was undergoing change, he added.

Orbán said it had been a "historic, professional and moral gesture" on the part of the medical chamber to end the practice of gratuity payments and enter into cooperation with the government.

Meanwhile, the prime minister said the government was not linking pay



hikes for teachers to EU funds, adding that it was indisputable that Hungary could raise their pay on its own. But this would be a 5-6-year process, while with external financing, this could be reduced to 3 years.

Regarding the sovereignty protection law, he said the aim was "to serve transparency and the public". When Fidesz was founded, he added, it took the side of the public against the Communists; now the same methods must be used "to fight against the big foreign powers that want to exert influence over Hungary". Orbán dismissed the suggestion that the law would affect the media, saying that people making such accusations were doing so out of fear, but he preferred to "start out from the facts" rather from the emotion of fear. The prime minister said that in the last general election, several million dollars had been used to influence its outcome. This, he added, was not about the media but about the issue of foreign political financing. The law, he said, closed loopholes against attempts to influence the elections, and it would be clear in a few months how the law worked in practice. If it appeared necessary, changes could be made, he added.

Asked why the planned child protection law had not come before the parliament in the autumn, Orbán said the government could not "fight two battles at the same time". Since the referendum on child protection, a Fidesz working group has been drafting the bill, he said.

Addressing the issue of guest workers, Orbán said fears were justified in the case of Western Europe, but not in Hungary's case. Significant labour reserves were available and there was no need for a large influx of guest workers, he added. Orbán said it was not the government but private companies that brought in guest workers, and this was subject to strict rules. These may be tightened if necessary, he added. No one, he said, could stay in Hungary illegally, and when the legal basis for staying expired, foreign guest workers would have to leave the country. Guest workers were allowed only from countries with which a deportation agreement is in force, he added.

Asked about the debate on euthanasia launched by a terminally ill constitutional lawyer, Orbán said a referendum initiative was under way that the government had nothing to do with, and further action would be based on the plebiscite's outcome. He said it was not simply a legal issue, but also a human one involving a "shocking human fate". "All I can say to the person involved ... is that we are with him, we sympathise with him; we wish him much strength, and, if he'll let us, we will pray for him, too, so that he can get through these difficult times."

### **SZIJJÁRTÓ: UN UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTS HUNGARY-SPONSORED RESOLUTION**

The United Nations General Assembly has unanimously adopted a resolution

initiated by Hungary aimed at improving the water supply and sanitary conditions for health care institutions, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, said on Facebook. Referring to the Hungarian government's earlier commitment to contributing to efforts aimed at meeting water-related challenges, Szijjártó said those global problems "pose serious risks, and could easily trigger further waves of migration." The new resolution could be "a step in removing the shocking fact" that 20% of the world's health facilities have no proper drinking water and hygiene, impacting some 1.7 billion people, the minister said. "We have invested much in the most modern water and water management technologies, bringing Hungary in the global forefront of the water industry." He added that the Hungarian initiative was co-sponsored by 54 other UN members, which is "a clear recognition of Hungary's effort."

### **NOVÁK: TRANSCARPATHIA HUNGARIANS 'IN OUR THOUGHTS, WORDS AND PRAYERS'**

President Katalin Novák expressed her support and sympathy for ethnic Hungarians in western Ukraine's Transcarpathia region, in an interview with local weekly Kárpáti Igaz Szó, assuring the community that "we are with them in our thoughts, words and prayers every day, especially at Christmas time." In the interview published on Thursday, Novák

noted that she had visited Kyiv at the invitation of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky twice this past year, with her latest visit having been in August. The president said she had conveyed the intent to make peace, along with the wish for the guarantee of the rights of the Hungarian minority to her Ukrainian counterpart. She said ethnic Hungarians had to simultaneously endure the difficulties of their everyday lives, the burden of war, restrictions to their rights and the consequences of internal migration.

Novák said the Transcarpathian Hungarian community could find strength in their faith and their Hungarian identity. "The free use of the mother tongue isn't just a requirement for the survival of an indigenous national minority, but one of the most fundamental European human rights norms," the president said, adding that the leaders of the motherland could not ignore this right being questioned.

Concerning the talks, Novák advised caution about drawing conclusions, adding, however, that it was a "good sign" that she had spoken with Zelensky multiple times since. She said it was important that Zelensky had visited Berehove (Beregszász) for a second time after their talks to meet with the leaders of local ethnic Hungarian organisations. She said ethnic Hungarian leaders, too, had spoken of "meaningful progress", but what that would be enough for was still to be seen. Novák said the new law on minority rights passed by Ukraine's parliament was a "necessary but not

sufficient" step towards easing the restrictions to ethnic Hungarians' rights. She said the aim to restore the rights of minorities prior to 2015 was not just "Hungarian stubbornness", arguing that taking away previously acquired minority rights and the right to the free use of the mother tongue was not acceptable in Europe, either. Hungary's demands, she said, were actually European requirements. "This is the bare minimum now that Brussels has decided to enter into accession talks," she said. Underlining the importance of peace, Novák said it was difficult to say how the conditions for peace could be reached, adding that the most important aim now was to bring an end to the "destructive phase" of the war. The president called for negotiations on how each side could achieve their goals by peaceful means and talks. She said Transcarpathian Hungarians had an interest in both Ukraine's and Hungary's prosperity and a peaceful coexistence with their broader environment. Novák said progress required unity between Hungary and Ukraine, adding that Hungary was prepared to maintain fair relations if it saw that ethnic Hungarians were respected. Ukraine, she said, still had a "long road" to navigate to join the alliances Hungary is a part of, adding that it would be impossible for the country to get there without Transcarpathian Hungarians. Novák said she wanted her meetings with Zelensky to convey the message that if the Hungarian president was able to engage in talks with the

Ukrainian president, then dialogue between Ukrainians and Hungarians was also possible.

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### **VARGA: SUPREME COURT RULED KARÁCSONY NOT EXEMPT FROM SOLIDARITY TAX**

The Kuria, Hungary's supreme court, has decided that Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony's municipality was not exempt from paying the central government's solidarity tax, the finance minister said on Thursday. Mihály Varga said on Facebook that in addition to the expiry on Oct 17 of immediate legal protection granted by the Metropolitan Regional Court, the Kuria also decided to void the Metropolitan Regional Court's decision. The Kuria fully endorsed the reasoning included in the Treasury's appeal, according to which the collection of tax arrears owed by Budapest had been fully in line with the law, he said. "According to the court ruling, Karácsony is not eligible for protection from tax payment, even temporarily," Varga said. "He must respect the law and pay the solidarity contribution with a view to helping out poorer settlements," he added.

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### **KARÁCSONY: GOVT PLANS 'TO TAKE BUDAPEST TRANSPORT BACK TO MIDDLE AGES'**

Government plans to discontinue the validity of Budapest passes

on services of state railways MÁV, national coach company Volán and the suburban railways HÉV from next year “would take Budapest transport back to the level of the Middle Ages”, the city’s mayor, Gergely Karácsony, told an online press briefing. The government, he said, should discard its plan and preserve the integrated transport system which had served suburban residents well for the past 20 years. At least half a million people would get poorer but dearer services if government plans were implemented, he said, adding that operating the public transport system would still cost taxpayers the same. He said the plan was “incomprehensible” and expressed hope that transport ministry officials would come back to the negotiating table. “If they cannot help, they should at least not make things worse,” he said, noting that the HÉV lines and trains had not been renovated since the service was nationalised in 2016, “MÁV is in crisis throughout the country” and cancellations in Volán services “are making transport more difficult for residents in central Hungary”. He also said that while the government was introducing a law to protect national sovereignty, it was holding consultations with Arab investors concerning the development of the valuable Rákosszentimre area of Budapest instead of discussing plans with the city leaders before looking for investors.

The ruling Fidesz party’s Budapest group said on Facebook that the mayor owed 2.175 billion forints (EUR 5.7m) for maintaining the Budapest pass. “Services are sooner or later switched off for those who fail to pay,” it said. “It works like this everywhere around the world,” it added. “Had they not distributed Budapest residents’ money among their friends”, bringing the capital to bankruptcy, they would now have enough to pay the bills,” the Fidesz group said.

### **DEFMIN: HUNGARY’S ARMY ORDERS HEAVY BRIGADE AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM FROM RHEINMETALL**

The Hungarian Armed Forces has asked Rheinmetall to develop a heavy brigade air defence system in line with NATO requirements, the defence ministry said on Thursday. Modernising equipment is not just about acquisitions but steady development, too, the ministry’s statement said. A key part of the Lynx fighting vehicle is its air defence system designed for active defence against low-flying, small drones and traditional air targets, it said. The German arms company has received an order to develop the short-range air defence system called Skyranger 30 Lynx. Based on the Lynx chassis, it will provide direct air defence protection for the heavy brigade equipped with

modern combat vehicles, the statement said.

### **BUDGET DEFICIT HUF 4,074 BN IN NOVEMBER, MINISTRY CONFIRMS**

Hungary’s cash-flow-based budget deficit was 4,074.3 billion forints (EUR 10.7bn) at the end of November, the Finance Ministry confirmed in a detailed reading of the data on Thursday. The central budget deficit came to 3,824.9 billion forints at the end of the month and the social security funds were 421.3 billion forints in the red. Separate state funds had a 171.9 billion forint surplus. The ministry said the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis resulting from sanctions, and the high-risk global economic environment had put the budget “under significant pressure”. In spite of the poor circumstances, the budget ensured the resources to preserve the value of pensions and maintain family subsidies, alongside the regulated system of utilities prices, it said. “In spite of extraordinary expenditures, the government is reducing the deficit and public debt from year to year,” it added. Spending on European Union-funded programmes came to 2,402.0 billion forints in January-November, while transfers from Brussels were just 1,265.4 billion forints. The ministry said revenue from taxes and contributions was up by 15.9 percent from the base period.



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**HUNGARY GROSS WAGES  
UP 14.0% YR/YR IN OCT**

Gross wages in Hungary grew by an annual 14.0% in October, to 564,400 forints (EUR 1,469), the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said. The average net wage including benefits rose by 14.0% to 389,300 forints, KSH said. The average gross wage without benefits increased by 14.5%, to 540,200 forints. Real wages increased by 3.7%, calculating with October CPI of 9.9%.

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**CBANK DIRECTOR:  
INFLATION COULD FALL  
BELOW 6% BY YEAR-END**

The annual consumer price index could fall below 6% by the end of the year, the disinflationary trend that started in 2023 will continue early next year and inflation will return to the central bank's tolerance band in 2025, András Balatoni, a central bank director, told a press conference, presenting the National Bank of Hungary's

December Inflation Report. Balatoni said disciplined monetary policy, government measures to strengthen competition, muted domestic demand and the significantly lower external cost environment were the factors supporting disinflation in 2023. In its latest quarterly inflation report, the central bank projected annual average CPI of 17.6-17.7% this year, which could fall to 4.0-5.5% in 2024 and could sustainably return to the central bank's 3 percent tolerance band in 2025.

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**MORE THAN 10,000  
UKRAINIAN CITIZENS  
ENTER HUNGARY  
ON WEDNESDAY**

Fully 6,413 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 4,038 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 92 people, ORFK said on Thursday.

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**MENCZER:  
NO HUNGARIANS KNOWN  
TO BE AMONG VICTIMS  
OF PRAGUE SHOOTING**

A Hungarian foreign affairs official has expressed condolences and "shock" over the mass shooting in Prague in which several people lost their lives and dozens were injured, and he said so far there were no Hungarians known to be among the victims or injured. The Hungarian embassy is in contact with the university where the shooting took place and with the police, Tamás Menczer, the state secretary for bilateral relations of the ministry of foreign affairs and trade, said on Facebook on Thursday. He expressed sympathy for the family members of the victims and the injured, adding that they were "in our prayers". The shooting spree took place on Thursday afternoon on Jan Palach Square in front of the Institute of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague.