

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Danube flooding in Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events marking year-end

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

ORBÁN: 'BRUSSELS' AFFAIRS MUST BE PUT IN ORDER'

The prime minister has said that "Brussels' affairs must be put in order and the European Parliament elections next year will offer a good opportunity for that", in an interview published on the occasion of Christmas.

More will be at stake at the upcoming ballot than ever before, Viktor Orbán told publisher Mediaworks. "The EU has gradually weakened over the past years, its scope of influence has narrowed in the global economy, it has been unable to substantially move forward in boosting its self-defence capabilities and to tackle the conflicts in its vicinity in line with its own interests," he said. The EU, Orbán said, "has even been incapable of confronting all those problems, then conducting introspection and correcting its policy". He said behind all this was that "it is Washington and the Soros empire, not the member states or European citizens, who keep telling Brussels bureaucrats what to do". "This is bad for Europe, this must be changed." Concerning the issue of Ukraine's EU integration and the related recent summit in Brussels, Orbán said that he had consistently represented Hungary's position that starting accession talks was "a bad idea".

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ORBÁN DISCUSSES UKRAINE EU ACCESSION

In an interview with publisher Mediaworks, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán noted in connection with Ukraine's EU accession serious economic problems that had already emerged in two areas. One, he said, was the damage caused by Ukrainian grain to farmers and hauliers in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The other, he said, was the absence of any preliminary studies on the impact Ukraine's future membership could have on French, German or Hungarian farmers, small entrepreneurs, retailers, hauliers and on member states' economies in general. The prime minister said that although EU integration is a long procedure, all member states have the possibility "around seventy times" to either slow down or stop it, but the decision at last week's summit in Brussels "means that 26 countries want Ukraine to become an EU member". He said basic questions had not been answered because "many thought that the decision was just a political gesture, of a geopolitical nature".

Asked whether he was concerned that his supporters "were completely fed up with the EU", the prime minister said he "accepted that as a natural fact". "I myself am fed up with Brussels," he said, adding that "the question is however what conclusions are drawn from the situation". Orbán said the conclusion he drew was this:

"let's try to go deeper, take positions, gather allies and fix the European Union". "Being angry is not enough, Brussels must be conquered," he said. Put to him whether financially supporting Ukraine would be the right decision considering that it is an important neighbour, a country attacked by Russia and fighting for its survival, Orbán said it was a legitimate question which he said was one to be considered by Hungary's parliament. "All we can say today is that any member state wanting to give Ukraine money should do so outside the EU budget and not by giving out our [Hungary's] money."

Asked about "bad relations between Hungary and Ukraine" over the past years, the prime minister said he had rethought that question several times and expressed his firm position that Hungary bore no responsibility for that. He attributed the deterioration of bilateral relations to Ukraine scrapping in 2015 the law that guaranteed the rights of the country's Hungarian community to exist as a national minority.

The rights of Transcarpathian Hungarians to their culture, education in Hungarian and the broader use of their mother tongue were scrapped eight years ago, Orbán said, calling on Ukraine to restore those rights which he said would be a starting point for improving bilateral ties. Asked about the recent agreement reached by the European Parliament and the European Commission on the EU's new migration and asylum pact, the prime minister said

that an earlier given word on taking decisions only with a unanimous vote had been broken and the position of Hungary and Poland ignored. Orbán called it "a bad pact", arguing that the only solution in the issue of migration was to process asylum requests before an applicant enters EU territory. Hungarian law, over which Brussels is suing the country, stipulates this rule, he said. Orbán said his efforts over the past eight years to make other member states understand the concept had failed. "They in fact want, as they say, to manage, not stop migration," said Orbán. He said that in the legal procedure Hungary will face for "not executing what Brussels says" Hungary "will prove that the EU rule for allowing in people whose application had not been processed in advance, and requiring us to take over migrants already accepted in by other member states goes against the Hungarian basic law".

Speaking about Hungary's economy, Orbán said its performance this year had to be assessed in light of events over the past four years which included the coronavirus pandemic, followed by the war in Ukraine causing energy prices to soar. He said that as a result of the EC's policy of sanctions, inflation also skyrocketed. Orbán said that since the outbreak of Covid in spring 2020, Hungary's goal was to keep its economy going. "We have achieved that goal," the prime minister said, adding that despite the difficulties, Hungary was now in a position to be in a lot better situation with good prospects for 2024.

Orbán said "the nature of 2024 will be different than that of the previous years". In 2023 the goal was to reduce price increases to below ten percent which he said had been achieved. The prime minister said it was even possible that inflation would fall to seven percent by the end of the year and could be around five percent in 2024. "In 2023 we fought to maintain and protect what we had achieved before, but in 2024 we will work for Hungary to move forward, to be in a better shape, and put families once again in the centre," he said. Orbán said he believed that "the past couple of years in which we have overcome various crises and mastered dangers have strengthened our confidence and self-esteem". "We are a talented, hardworking nation capable of overcoming hardships, a community that never gives up the hope even in the most difficult times that better times are to come," the prime minister said.

PRESIDENT: 'THE MORE PEOPLE OUR CALL FOR PEACE REACHES, THE GREATER ITS EFFECT GOING TO BE'

Hungarians are a peace and freedom loving people, President Katalin Novák said in an interview broadcast by news channel Hír TV on Sunday, Christmas Eve, expressing her hope that "the more people our call for peace reaches, the greater its effect is going to be". Novák said "a sense of fear has embedded itself under our skin" since "a devastating war"

broke out in neighbouring Ukraine a year and a half ago, adding however that "that fear, although less palpable now ... is still with us". The president asked Hungarians "to think about Transcarpathian Hungarians now, at Christmas time". "There, recruiting officers can knock on the door of local Hungarians at any minute to take the men to the frontline and family members at home are constantly worried for those fighting on the battlefield," she said. "It is now that we feel how valuable peace - that we here, in Hungary have - is," Novák said. "That peace we have is however extremely fragile and it is under threat." She said that for Hungary, nurturing close relations not only with Ukraine and with its neighbours, but also "with all of its allies around the world" was of immense help. "If we have the ties, if we open doors that were closed or appeared to be so, then we will have a greater chance to make the voice of Hungarians heard in every corner of the world," she said.

The president said that "we must accept one another even if we think differently about matters of the world" and underlined the importance of showing respect to someone else with a different opinion and seeking the possibility of a compromise. Speaking about Hungarian communities beyond the borders, Novák said they had tightened their cooperation in the current difficult situation. The president said she trusted that "some sort of reconciliation" would develop between Hungarians and Ukrainians

in Transcarpathia, which she called "indispensable" for their long-term coexistence. Novák said that being the first woman to serve as Hungary's president carried responsibility. "It may give inspiration and encouragement to other women which goes to show that today nothing is out of reach for a woman in Hungary," she said. "I trust that my openness to the world will help more and more people to feel that I am also their president."

Speaking about the importance of family, Novák said "our family is the circle in which we start the day every morning and to where we return every evening. In the absence of a family a void opens in our lives every day". Novák said Christmas to her was "the most important and most awaited family holiday and, as a Reformed Christian believer, the birth of Jesus". "This is a message of joy, the miracle of birth," said the president, wishing everybody a Merry Christmas.

PARLT SPEAKER OFFERS CONDOLENCES OVER SCHAUBLE'S PASSING

House Speaker László Kövér has sent his condolences to his German counterpart over the passing of Wolfgang Schauble, former president of the Bundestag, according to a statement released on Wednesday. Schauble died on Tuesday, at the age of 81. In his letter to Baerbel Bas, Kövér said Schauble had "remained a true friend of Hungary throughout his life". "He was a politician of great character, a humanist and a man,"

said Kövér, adding that Schauble, who also served as finance minister and the leader of the CDU party, “was committed to open and earnest dialogue”. He was an influential politician, also valued and respected by his opponents, Kövér added. Schauble was one of the few German politicians who played a key role in the German reunification and was an active supporter of the political regime change in Hungary, and in central Europe, the parliamentary speaker said. “With his passing, Germany and Europe have lost an excellent politician, and Hungary a true friend,” Kövér said, and expressed his deepest condolences also on behalf of the Hungarian parliament.

DEFMIN: HUNGARY ‘LIVING ERA OF DANGERS DUE TO OTHERS’ BAD DECISIONS’

Hungary’s defence minister said Hungary was living in an “era of dangers due to the bad decisions of others”, in a video posted on Facebook on Wednesday. The year 2023 had brought wars, migration, the threat of terror and “explosive social tensions” to Europe, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. “Bad decisions such as endless weapon deliveries, encouraging and financing migration, and the tensions, security risks and terror threat brought on by immigration impact Hungary too,” he said. While Hungary doesn’t participate in the war, it will prepare to strengthen its defence capabilities to protect its peace and security, Szalay-

Bobrovniczky said. Besides building a “high-tech Armed Forces”, that includes developing the country’s military industry, he added. “We will protect our sovereignty from those expecting us to hand over the decisions on the fate of Hungarians,” he said.

DEFMIN: FIRST HUNGARIAN- MADE LYNX ROLLS OFF PRODUCTION LINE

The first Hungarian-made Lynx armoured infantry fighting vehicle rolled off Rheinmetall’s assembly line in Zalaegerszeg, in western Hungary, on Saturday, the defence minister said. Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky called the event “a historic milestone” in the Hungarian army’s development programme, according to a ministry statement. The minister said the Lynx is “the most modern, state of the art infantry fighting vehicle of our time, which reflects the cultural change that has begun in the Hungarian Armed Forces”. Creating a modern, high-tech defence force will ensure that the Hungarian army “can not only effectively provide for the defence of our country, but can also fully meet its obligations to international allies,” the minister said.

STATE SECRETARIAT SENDING HUF 20 M IN EMERGENCY AID TO C ROMANIA SECONDARY SCHOOL

The state secretary for Hungarian communities abroad is sending

20 million forints (EUR 52,356) in emergency aid over a tragic accident to the Tamási Áron Secondary School in Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely), in central Romania, it said on Saturday. A 17-year-old boy died on Monday when one-third of the school’s student hostel collapsed after the building’s exterior wall came down. Three girls were pulled from the rubble, one of whom is still in life-threatening condition, the secretariat said in a statement. The aid will be provided through the alliance of Hungarian teachers in Romania and will go toward the replacement of damaged technical equipment used by students, it said.

LMP PROPOSES BUILDING INSULATION SCHEME

Opposition LMP is submitting to parliament a draft resolution calling for the launch of a complex building insulation and energy upgrade scheme, the party’s spokeswoman said on Wednesday. The programme would have an annual budget of 600 billion forints (EUR 1.6bn), Anna Süveg told an online press conference, adding that it would be “one of the easiest ways” of reducing Hungary’s energy consumption, dependence on foreign energy, air pollution, CO2 emissions and “energy poverty”. Süveg said buildings accounted for close to 40% of greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption, and 70-80% of homes did not meet modern technical and thermal engineering standards.

She said spending 600 billion forints in government and European Union funding on the project each year would be enough to upgrade some 100,000 homes. Under the scheme, households would be able to bid for subsidised loans of up to 10 million forints to cover the energy upgrades, she said. Homes that are in a poor condition, Süveg said, would be required to undergo deep energy renovations with a view to reducing their energy consumption by at least 50%. Those who could not afford the upgrades would receive higher subsidies, she added.

MORE THAN 9,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY

Fully 4,214 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 4,798 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters

(ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 52 people, ORFK said on Wednesday.

RECORD HIGH LOW TEMPS RECORDED IN BUDAPEST ON CHRISTMAS DAY

The National Meteorological Service recorded 6.6 degrees Celsius lows in Budapest on December 25, the warmest ever recorded that day. The previous Budapest record was 6.5 C., recorded in 1950.

NOBEL LAUREATE KRAUSZ WINS PUBLIC MEDIA'S PERSON OF THE YEAR AWARD

Hungarian Nobel laureate physicist Ferenc Krausz is this year's recipient of the Public Media's Person of the Year Award given in recognition of the achievements in his professional career and activities having outstanding impact on society,

Hungary's Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) said on Friday. The award was founded by public service media operator Duna Médiaszolgáltató and MTVA in 2020 to draw attention to personalities who "enrich the community of all Hungarians in the world" and in recognition of their outstanding results and intellectual achievements, MTVA said in a statement. Krausz received together with his French colleagues Pierre Agostini and Anne L'Huillier the 2023 Nobel Prize in Physics "for experimental methods that generate attosecond pulses of light for the study of electron dynamics in matter". The first recipient of the award was in 2020 biochemist Katalin Karikó, who this year received the Nobel Prize in Medicine, and in 2021 Olympic, World and European champion fencer Áron Szilágyi. Last year, the award went to Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, designer of Hungary's House of Music.