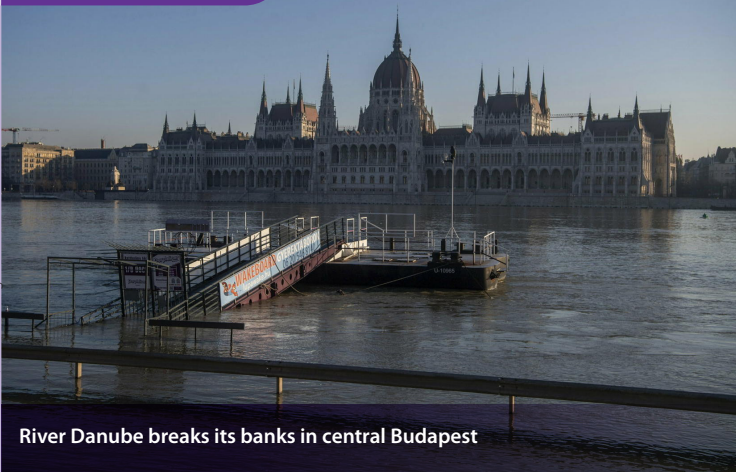


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Zoltán Balogh

River Danube breaks its banks in central Budapest

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events marking year-end

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

**Flooding
on Hungary's rivers**

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ IN TALKS WITH UKRAINIAN OFFICIAL

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has spoken by phone with Andriy Yermak, the head of the Ukrainian President's Office.

Szjijártó said Hungary had a vested interest in maintaining good relations with all its neighbours. "Continuous, high-level talks are important because they give us hope of improving our ties, and we have an interest in maintaining the best possible relations with all of our neighbours. We will, of course, not change our pro-peace stance, but I am looking forward to our personal meeting in January, as an opportunity to discuss the most pressing bilateral issues," he said on Facebook after the talks.

Concerning the invitation by Ukrainian President Zelensky, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán recently said in an international press conference that 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.

Ukraine and Hungary are preparing a meeting of Zelenskiy and Orbán in the near future, the Ukrainian president's chief of staff said on Thursday.

BÓKA: EU ENLARGEMENT BECOMING POLITICISED

Rather than being driven by rational decisions, the European Union's enlargement process is becoming increasingly politicised, the minister for EU affairs, János Bóka, said on Facebook. While it had been long seen as objective and merit-based, the procedure's values and seriousness "are now becoming questionable", he said. "Should a candidate for membership realise they do not have to fulfil conditions and go through a pre-determined procedure, the entire procedure may turn into politically motivated power demonstrations," he warned. That may lead to candidates seeking "political protectors" inside or outside the EU and use their power to influence the accession procedure. The speed of integration would then depend on the size and strength of the protectors rather than the conditions fulfilled, Bóka said. "Such practices would further rock the already cracked foundations of the European Union's unity."

Regarding Ukraine's EU membership, Bóka said it remained uncertain if or when the talks on it would start. "We are at the start of a process containing 75-80 points requiring a unanimous vote from member states. Then, the accepted accession talks will have to be ratified by the parliament of each individual member state," he

said. "The financing of Ukraine is a similarly complicated issue ... the situation is changing almost day by day due to the war. Consequently, it is impossible to make responsible statements on its financial needs in the coming four years," he said. "To ensure the necessary support for Ukraine, Hungary is promoting an inter-governmental fund to be set up outside of the EU's budgetary framework. The member states would be free to make contributions as they see fit. Until the fund is set up, support can be ensured from the current budget ... there would be no need to amend the seven-year financial framework," he said.

SZÁNTHÓ TO FOX NEWS RADIO: 'YOU SHOULD BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO STAND UP AGAINST WOKE INSANITY'

The Hungarian recipe is that "you should be brave enough to stand up against woke insanity," Miklós Szánthó, the director of conservative think-tank Center for Fundamental Rights said in an interview with Fox News Radio. In the interview, parts of which were posted on the radio's website on Thursday, Szánthó discussed Hungarian conservatism, Hungary's migration policy and border protection measures and European Union policies.

"What makes Hungary, Hungary's conservative revolution so special is that Hungary still sticks to common

sense, to the three values of God, homeland and family," he said. "We are part of the West, except that we've remained normal," said Szánthó. "We are trying to defend our Judeo-Christian heritage ... we also stand up for national identity and state sovereignty ... and of course we are trying to defend the children and the family against this gender nonsense." He said Hungary's most important issue was its fight against the "deep state" of Brussels to protect its sovereignty. "You have your deep state in Washington, DC, and in the federal government, we do have our deep state in Brussels, in the European Union." Szánthó said that "Brusselites" had departed from the original concept of the EU's founding fathers and were seeking to create a political union by withdrawing more and more powers from member states and "destroying their sovereignty". Despite those efforts, Szánthó said, Hungary was not keen on stepping out of the EU, adding that "we want to conquer Brussels".

Asked about Hungary's border protection, Szánthó said that related measures served to protect the country against illegal migration and "the rising tide of anti-Semitism". He said the western elite had a more liberal approach towards migration because it wanted to see states with a mixed ethnic composition ranging "from Portugal to Lithuania" in hope of getting the votes of immigrants later on. "You should be brave enough to stand up against

this woke insanity. You should be brave and you should not remain silent. Because that is exactly what this progressive ideology and progressive totalitarian behaviour tries to reach" he said. "Hungary is trying to serve as an engine of conservative cooperation." Szánthó said the Hungarian right wanted to be an engine to get common sense back to its due place in politics.

OFFICIAL: HUNGARY REJECTS IMPLEMENTING EU MIGRATION PACT

Hungary doesn't want to implement the measures of the European Union's migration pact which was not adopted with a unanimous vote, and rejects settling migrants in the country, the prime minister's chief security advisor told commercial broadcaster TV2. György Bakondi said the EU approach to allow migrants into the bloc's territory to await the assessment of their asylum applications "after they have crossed 6 to 8 safe countries" was "mistaken". "In 2015, botched EU asylum policies led to some 400,000 migrants jostling here", he warned. Bakondi said Hungary had done everything in its power to change EU decision-makers' stance, but its efforts had been in vain.

Under the pact, EU countries may pay a quota if they refuse to accept illegal migrants, he said. At the same time, all member states are mandated to accept immigrants in emergency

situations, "and determining when it is an emergency will be decided centrally". "Settling migrants" was against Hungary's fundamental law, he said, and it was in Hungary's national interest only to accept those who have already obtained a refugee status. Through the National Consultation public survey, Hungarians could give a mandate to the government to continue to vigorously represent its stance in the EU, he added.

TOURISM AGENCY: BOOKINGS FOR NEW YEAR WEEKEND UP BY 11%

Bookings by local and foreign guests to spend the year-end weekend in Hungarian hotels have gone up by 11% compared with the previous year, the Hungarian Tourism Agency (MTÜ) said. Accommodation for a total of 365,000 guest nights have been booked so far with 207,000 reservations made for destinations in the countryside with Lake Balaton and the Mátra-Bükk Hills being most popular, the agency said. Bookings by foreign guests have increased by 13%, MTÜ said. A total of 158,000 reservations have been made in Budapest, 14 percent more than in 2022, said MTÜ. Fully 72% of the foreign guests have booked an accommodation to celebrate the New Year in Budapest with most of them coming from Italy, Spain, Germany, France and Britain. MTÜ noted that last year some 14 million guests had spent a total of 40 million guest nights in Hungarian hotels.

It said that tourism is a strategic sector in Hungary which gave some 12% of the country's GDP in 2022. The sector has around 100,000 businesses employing over 400,000 people, MTÜ said. A strategic goal set for 2030 is to increase the sector's contribution to Hungary's GDP to 16%.

GOVT TOPS UP BAROSS GÁBOR CREDIT SCHEME

The government has decided to raise the allocation for the Baross Gábor Reindustrialisation Programme, a subsidised credit scheme for businesses, by 200 billion forints to 1,200 billion (EUR 3.1bn), the economic development ministry said. With the 200 billion forint top-up, the government aims to support investments in manufacturing and services, FDI abroad and fleet upgrades at logistics companies, the ministry said. The credit targets the food, construction, telecommunications, pharmaceutical, tourism and catering, logistics and green industry sectors, as well as automotive industry suppliers, it added.

The scheme, launched on Feb 1, offered businesses credit capped at 6.0% for forint loans and 3.5% for euro loans. Credit will now be available at 5% for forint loans and 3% for euro loans, the ministry said. So far, lenders have signed contracts for corporate credit worth of more than 950 billion forints in the framework of the scheme. Outlays have reached 700 billion forints.

PROFIT-DRIVEN INFLATION PRESSURING HEADLINE CPI

Csaba Balázs Rigó, the head of Hungary's Competition Office (GVH), has said corporate profits were to blame, in part, for high inflation. In an interview published in the daily Magyar Nemzet, Rigó said GVH probes had shown that some commerce sector players, among them multinationals that generated profits "in the hundreds of billions of forints" in Hungary, had raised prices of some staples at a faster rate than the increase in costs. In addition to the scale of those "unjustified" price increases, some businesses took advantage of stable demand for some products in spite of the higher prices, he added.

He also said that some shops had tried to cover their losses on price-capped staples by raising the prices of other popular food products, contributing to the high food price inflation. Rigó acknowledged the disinflationary effect of an online price monitoring platform for food products at big supermarket chains, but said it was "no magic weapon". He added that the platform, which GVH operates, would continue in 2024 in enhanced form, as the prices of gluten- and lactose-free products were added to the comparison list.

Rigó also pointed to the impact on disinflation of well-timed government

measures, efforts by the central bank and GVH's targeted probes. Looking ahead, he said GVH would launch in January an analysis of the impact of artificial intelligence on competition and consumer practices.

MORE THAN 12,500 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON WEDNESDAY

Fully 6,251 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Wednesday, while 6,297 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 59 people, ORFK said on Thursday.

MINISTRY FLAGS UPGRADES, CAPACITY EXPANSION OF HUNGARY'S ELECTRICITY NETWORK

A substantial amount of the 300 billion forints (EUR 784m) of newly arrived EU funds will go towards upgrading and expanding the capacity of Hungary's electricity network, also with a view to improving its operational reliability, the energy ministry said on Thursday. Fully 779.5 million euros of REPowerEU funds were transferred on Thursday, the ministry noted on Facebook. The ministry said it was taking measures to

expand energy communities, spread energy storage, and use more biogas, biomethane, geothermal energy and hydrogen. Besides expanding production capacity and applying clean technologies, funding will go towards retraining professionals in the sector. Further, businesses greenifying transport can request a non-refundable state funding of 2.8-4 million forints to buy a pure electric car, van or minibus.

WATER AUTHORITY: DANUBE WATER LEVEL SLOWLY RECEDING AFTER RIVER BREAKS ITS BANKS

The high water level of the River Danube reached 693cm in Budapest at 8pm on Wednesday, breaking its banks, and it has been slowly receding since, the water management authority said. The water level has been in the 690-692cm range ever since, and has not reached the 700cm threshold which would trigger a second-degree flood alert, it added. In Mohács, in southern Hungary, the highest water level is projected to reach 805cm in the early hours of Sunday. The River Tisza is expected to reach a first-degree flood warning between Tokaj and Kisköre, in north-eastern Hungary. Wednesday's forecast showed no significant rain for the next few days and medium temperatures staying around 0 C.