

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



Athletes taking the oath before travelling to the Winter Youth Olympic Games in Gangwon, S Korea

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**EU ministers for social affairs meet in Namur, Belgium**

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

## TOP STORY

# TEACHERS' WAGE HIKE 'SECURED BY EC GUARANTEE'

Hungary received the "written guarantee" expected from the European Commission on Wednesday, and so school and kindergarten teachers will receive the planned 32.2% wage hike, the head of the Prime Minister's Office said.

The wages of vocational school employees will also be raised, from government coffers, Gergely Gulyás told MTI. The raises will be in effect from January 1, he added. The hike will raise teachers' wages to 71.8% of the average wage of degree holders. Hungary's commitment to raise their salaries to 80% of that will be achieved by a planned raise of 21% at the beginning of 2025, he added. The EU funds, 530 million euros, will cover 12% of the raise until 2030. The measure will impact some 140,000 people, Gulyás said.

In an interview with commercial ATV, Gulyás said at the end of December that the government was working to ensure that teachers' pay rises by 32% on Jan 1. Accordingly, the government has published decrees with the wage details for social consultation, Gulyás said. Earlier this month, two trade unions urged that the government's recent plans to raise teachers' salaries should be rolled out to staff in vocational training and in higher education. They warned that introducing a hike "without applying uniform principles" would lead to a tension within the profession.

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**MINISTRY: HUNGARY CORN FARMERS TO GET HUF 6 BN IN EU COMPENSATION FOR UKRAINE GRAIN GLUT**

Hungary has managed to secure 6 billion forints (EUR 15.8m) in compensation for corn farmers from Brussels for the impact of grain imports from Ukraine, the agriculture ministry said on Wednesday. Hungarian farmers received 5.9 billion forints in compensation for their losses as a consequence of EU measures affecting Ukrainian farm products last year, the ministry said in a statement. The European Commission compensated Hungary with 15.9 million euros in response to pressure from the member states affected, it added.

It said the flood of Ukrainian farm products into Europe as a result of the protracted war between Russia and Ukraine and the "ill-advised" sanctions imposed by the EU had put farmers in neighbouring EU countries in "an extremely difficult situation". In the absence of steps taken by the EU, Hungary was forced to impose a national ban on the import of Ukrainian farm products, it noted. Hungary also considered it important for farmers to receive compensation, the ministry noted, adding that the EC had acknowledged the losses incurred by farmers and had approved partial compensation for them.

Corn farmers who are eligible for compensation were able to submit their application to the state treasury between Oct 1 and 15, the ministry said, adding that 5.9 billion forints were paid out by the end of last year. The ministry noted that Hungary was upholding its national ban on Ukrainian grain imports in the interest of restoring the earlier market conditions and vowed that the country would continue to fight for farmers' interests in Brussels together with other affected member states.

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**DEFMIN: NEW BATCH OF LEOPARD 2A7 TANKS ARRIVE AT N HUNGARY ARMY BASE**

A new batch of Leopard 2A7 battle tanks arrived at the army base at Tata, in northern Hungary, on Wednesday morning, the defence minister said, adding that the tanks "will serve the protection of the Hungarian people". "Hungary's military reform is going ahead at full speed with top-notch vehicles continuing to arrive," Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said on Facebook. According to the military portal honvedelem.hu, three Leopard 2A7HU tanks were delivered on Wednesday to Tata in addition to the five already put in service at the base there. Hungary has procured altogether 44 Leopard tanks to be delivered by 2028.

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**OFFICIAL ADVOCATES EUROPEAN COOPERATION BASED ON 'RESPECT, SOVEREIGNTY'**

"We believe in a European cooperation based on respect and sovereignty," Barna Pál Zsigmond, state secretary at the European affairs ministry, said on Wednesday. He noted European Council President Charles Michel's bid to run in the European Parliament elections, and said "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the most experienced member of this circle, could even serve temporarily as the head of the body". Zsigmond said that the European left was "afraid" that "in many cases the right-wingers are expected to win" in upcoming elections "due to Brussels' mismanagement of recent crises". Concerning Hungary's upcoming EU presidency in the second half of the year, the state secretary said he believed it would be "another excellent presidency" adding that "we are prepared and we will assess all proposals on the basis of whether they address real problems, and whether they take into consideration the interests of Hungarians and other citizens of the EU, as well as of Hungary and all other EU members".

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**GOVT OFFICIAL URGES EPP TO RETURN TO 'CHRISTIAN ROOTS'**

State secretary Csaba Latorcai has slammed the European People's Party (EPP) for "adopting cancel

culture” after Finnish EPP MEP Petri Sarvamaa proposed launching an Article 7(2) procedure against Hungary. In a post on Facebook late on Tuesday, Latorcai said the EPP MEP aimed to take away Hungary’s European Union voting rights with a “hate campaign” because the country had taken the position in December that it was too early to start accession talks with Ukraine. A “dictatorship of opinion” has reached the EPP, too, he added, and urged the party to “return to its Christian roots”.

### **FIDESZ MP: EUROPEAN LIBERAL LEFT ‘CONTRADICTING ITSELF AGAIN’**

It did not take long in the new year for the European liberal left “to contradict itself again”, Judit Varga, the (Fidesz) head of parliament’s European affairs committee, said on Tuesday. Varga cited recent reports of “the Brussels elite” planning to initiate another Article 7 procedure against Hungary that would set the basis for suspending the country’s voting rights. She said in a Facebook post that this came after Hungary had built the European Union’s best-rated justice system, which she said was proven by the fact that the European Commission had begun to unfreeze the cohesion funds the country is entitled to. Varga added it was clear that when it came to “Hungarophobia, the liberal left doesn’t even believe its own institutions”.

### **AGMIN: GERMAN FARMERS’ PROTEST ‘TO DEFINE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE’**

Recent protests mounted by German farmers against subsidy cuts is a move that will “define the future existence of European agriculture”, the Hungarian agriculture minister said on Wednesday, indicating Hungarian farmers’ solidarity with their German counterparts. Speaking to public broadcaster M1, István Nagy called it “outrageous” that the German chancellor was still advocating support to Ukraine while his country’s “food sovereignty is at risk” and local farmers were facing serious problems. “It is clear that the EU’s internal market has turned over; while local farmers must obey rigorous regulations, Brussels has opened the bloc’s markets to Ukraine where no regulations apply,” said Nagy, expressing Hungarian farmers’ solidarity with their German peers. Speaking to public radio’s morning programme, Nagy said “the EU’s agricultural sector has never before been so overideologised”. “It is not about Ukrainian farmers any more, but about US, Dutch, German and Saudi Arabian multinational companies that have purchased vast arable lands in Ukraine eyeing the safe EU markets”. “And they wrap it up in a green ideology, making European farmers feel guilty,” the minister said.

### **NEARLY 10,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON TUESDAY**

Fully 5,092 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Tuesday, while 4,819 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 99 people, ORFK said on Wednesday.

### **HUNGARIAN TOURIST NUMBERS IN CROATIA BREAK 2019 RECORD**

The number of Hungarian tourists visiting Croatia last year increased by 13% to a record 728,000 compared with 2019, the last record year, the Croatian National Tourism Board Office in Hungary said on Wednesday. The number of guest nights spent by Hungarians in the neighbouring country last year went up by 10% to 3.6 million compared with 2019, the office said in a statement. The increase in the number of Hungarian tourists was 30% in the months of February and May, and during the last three months of 2023, which shows that Croatia attracts Hungarians throughout the year for city visits, cultural programmes and active leisure activities, it said. The most popular destinations included the regions of Kvarner, Istria, Zadar and Split with the cities of Crikvenica, Medulin, Opatija, Poreč, Rovinj and Vir.