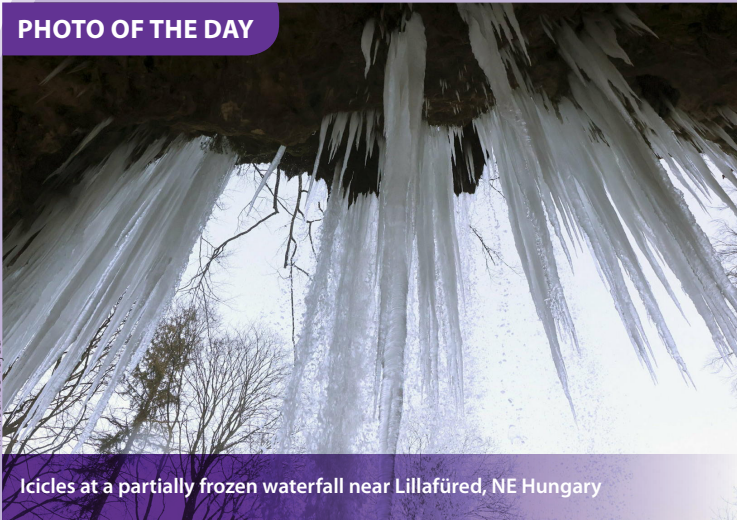


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/János Vajda

Icicles at a partially frozen waterfall near Lillafüred, NE Hungary

UPCOMING EVENTS

President Novák attends Davos World Econ Forum

EP plenary session

EU environment ministers' two-day meeting ends in Brussels

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

EC DISBURSES REPOWEREU FUNDS

The European Commission has transferred 140.1 million euros to Hungary in REPowerEU pre-financing grants under the post-pandemic Resilience and Recovery Facility (RRF).

In a statement, the EC noted that this was the last instalment of the payment after the pre-financing of 779.5 million euros on Dec 28. It said the funds would kick-start the implementation of key investments and reforms outlined in each chapter of the REPowerEU scheme, including energy conservation, production and diversification goals with a view to weaning Europe off Russian fossil fuels.

The EC said pre-financing payments to member states amounted to 20% of the additional funds requested to finance the country's REPowerEU chapter. It added that Monday's transfer of the pre-financing grants had followed the European Council's approval of Hungary's revised RRF plan containing a REPowerEU chapter and a signed financial agreement. The EC approved Hungary's 4.6 billion euro REPowerEU chapter of its modified RRF plan in November. The modified RRF plan is worth a total of 10.4 billion euros, including 6.5 billion euros of grants and 3.9 billion euros of RRF loans.

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CEE MINISTERS PRESS EC FOR STEPS TO MANAGE UKRAINE GRAIN GLUT

Central and eastern European agriculture ministers have once again turned to the European Commission for support in managing the impact of market disturbances caused by the flood of grain imports from Ukraine, Minister of Agriculture István Nagy said. In their letter to EC Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis and European Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski, the agriculture ministers of Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia gave an outline of the market losses their countries' agricultural products suffered due to Ukrainian grain imports, Nagy said in a statement. He said the flood of cheap Ukrainian grain was forcing central and eastern European farmers out of their traditional export markets. The minister said that in addition to high production costs, price and revenue risks and adverse weather conditions, the influx of Ukrainian grain caused extra concern for farmers in the region. Nagy said that because these five countries were key contributors to Europe's food security given their grain exports, Brussels had a duty to take steps to protect their markets and give them the opportunity to exploit their export potential, he said. One way of doing this, he added, was to introduce tariffs on the "most sensitive agricultural products". The minister said he and his counterparts

were calling on the EC to prepare a report on how Ukraine's agricultural production regulations comply with EU regulations.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY COUNTS ON AUSTRIA'S SUPPORT

When it comes to combatting illegal migration and supporting the EU accession bids of Western Balkan countries, Hungary counts on Austria's support, Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, told Hungarian public media in Vienna after talks with Austrian counterpart Alexander Schallenberg. The talks were part of a series of consultations aimed at preparing the ground for Hungary's EU presidency in the second half of the year, he said, adding that Austria was among EU countries that took action against illegal migration. Hungary's wants European regulations to be in line with international law so that temporary refugee stays are in the first safe country, noting that Hungary allowed people fleeing the war in Ukraine to seek refuge but kept out illegal migrants who had had passed through 3-5 safe countries.

Szijjártó called for a turnaround in Brussels, adding that the EU should not import problems from far away but help to solve them at their root. Africa's population was growing exponentially, he noted. Instead of tempting Africans to relocate, the EU should make investments, and nurture development and training locally, he

said. Hungary, he added, supported the development of African countries to the tune of several 10 million dollars, providing education scholarships for "many thousands" of African students.

Meanwhile, regarding the EU integration of Western Balkan countries, the minister said the bloc was in need of fresh dynamism, which the region could provide, so the pace of the accession process must be speeded up. This, he added, was one of the goals of Hungary's EU presidency.

Regarding bilateral matters, Szijjártó said Hungary and Austria was a reliable, predictable and fair partner in terms of energy supply, with than 20 percent of Hungary's annual gas consumption arriving via Austria. Both countries see energy supply as a pragmatic rather than an ideological issue, he said. Hungary, he said, supports Austria's candidacy for membership of the UN Security Council in 2027-28. The minister said he met the Austrian Freedom Party's general secretary and the party's members of the Vienna parliament's Hungarian-Austrian friendship group. He also met the head of the Austrian Manufacturers Association.

NAVRACSICS: LOCAL GOVTS, REGIONAL GOVT OFFICES MUST WORK MORE CLOSELY

Cooperation between local governments and regional offices of the central government "must be brought even closer", Tibor Navracsics,

the minister of public administration and regional development, said in Miskolc, in northern Hungary, on Monday. Navracsics said cooperation of the two branches "must be seamless" when fresh European Union funds released to Hungary "are put in service of regional development policy". Cooperation was already "excellent", he said, adding that Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén was one of Hungary's most highly performing counties. He noted that students and researchers of foundational universities have been excluded from the Erasmus and Horizon Europe programmes. Navracsics said he had asked the politically non-aligned mayor of Miskolc, who sits on the supervisory board of the city's university, to demonstrate to European decision-makers that foundational universities are independent of party politics, adding that the mayor's own political independence underpinned the point.

SOCIALISTS CALL ON GOVT TO DEVELOP FIXED TRACK TRANSPORT RATHER THAN BUYING AIRPORT

The opposition Socialists have called on the government to use central budget resources to develop fixed-track transport in Hungary rather than buying an airport. "The country's railway and suburban rail network is a shambles because

the Fidesz government has failed to spend money on developing its fixed-track and community transport infrastructure in the past ten years," the party's deputy leader, László Varga, told a press conference. He said community transport "is living its renaissance all over Europe", adding that "fixed-track systems are the greenest and most sustainable form of transport". "The government is now preparing to spend some 1,536 billion forints (EUR 4.5bn) on buying an airport which it should spend on developing the country's rail system," said Varga.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR OUTPUT FALLS 12.8% IN NOV

Output of Hungary's construction sector dropped by an annual 12.8% in November, albeit from a high base, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Monday. Output of the buildings segment fell by 18.3% and civil engineering output slipped 3.5%. In absolute terms, construction sector output reached 747 billion forints (EUR 2bn) in November. The buildings segment accounted for 58% of the total. In a month-on-month comparison, construction sector output fell by 2.6%, adjusted for seasonal and workday effects. Order stock was 21.2% lower at the end of November than twelve months earlier. Buildings segment orders were down by 15.6% and civil engineering orders

dropped by 25.3%. New orders jumped 60.3% during the period. New orders in the buildings segment slipped 19.5% but new civil engineering orders climbed 186%. Construction sector output fell by 5.3% in January-November from the base period.

MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY TO OFFER SERIES OF PROGRAMMES MARKING DAY OF HUNGARIAN CULTURE

The Museum of Ethnography is offering guided tours and night-time programmes in a week-long series of events marking the Day of Hungarian Culture held on Jan 22. Visitors are offered guided tours of the temporary exhibition I find thee with God, my brother! - Gypsy stories, focusing on the work of linguist and ethnographer Kamill Erdős, on Jan 18, the museum said on its website. The same show will be the subject of a family afternoon and the starting point of a podium discussion on Gypsy music between renowned musicians Roby Lakatos, Jenő Lisztes and Zsolt Szomora on Jan 21.

Families are invited to spend the night in the museum on Jan 26.

January 22 was declared the Day of Hungarian Culture in 1989, marking the day when poet Ferenc Kölcsey finalised the text that later became Hungary's national anthem in 1823.