

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Prime Minister's Press Office/Vivien Cher Benko

UPCOMING EVENTS

PM Orbán's public radio interview

Vietnamese delegation continues visit in Hungary

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

FUNDS LINKED TO LGBTQ, MIGRATION ISSUES

The president of the European Commission has linked Hungary's future EU funding to LGBTQ and migration issues, the head of the Prime Minister's Office has said.

Gergely Gulyás told a government press briefing that the EC and EP were exerting pressure on Hungary's government in respect of two issues "on which Hungarian voters have clearly expressed their opinion". Wednesday's European parliamentary debate "made this clear to everyone", Gulyás said. While the EC acknowledged the measures taken by the Hungarian government to ensure judicial independence, the commission's president made the release of further EU funds contingent on Hungary changing its stance on LGBTQ and migration issues, he said. Hungarian law guarantees the independence of the judiciary, he said, yet it took another six months for the EC to acknowledge this and to release some of the funds due to Hungary. The commission and the EP were nevertheless putting pressure on the Hungarian government in two cases regarding which Hungarian voters had clearly expressed their opinion, he said. The anti-migration position received more support than in any previous survey, and even this was surpassed by the outcome of the survey on protecting children from LGBTQ propaganda, he added.

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GULYÁS SLAMS LEFT WING FOR 'HINDERING WAGE HIKES'

The debate on teachers' wages shows that the Hungarian left wing has not given up hope of preventing hikes to teachers' salaries, Gergely Gulyás told a government press briefing. In addition to the "well-known Hungarian-hater" foreign MEPs, Hungarians, including MEPs of Momentum, also spoke in the debate, arguing that it was unacceptable for Hungary to receive EU funds, the head of the PM's Office said. Nevertheless, the left wing failed to prevent the release of the EU funds "that can be spent on raising teacher's wages". Gulyás noted that teachers, kindergarten teachers and vocational training instructors will receive a 32.2% pay rise in February, and another 21% pay rise can be expected next year. The average wage of teachers will rise to more than 672,000 forints (EUR 1,765) this year, more than 812,000 forints next year and around 880,000 forints in 2026. This means that teachers' wages can be doubled between 2022 and 2026, he added. By Jan 30, every teacher will receive the document on their wage increase, Gulyás said. European Union money, he said, was "our money". "We are not receiving it as a gift," he said, adding that the pay rise for teacher would cost around 6,000 billion forints, of which 1.77 billion euros or 700 billion forints would be provided by the EU.

Nurses' wages will rise by 20% from March 1, Gulyás added, so the

average wage of nurses will be 715,000 forints. He noted that, in line with the European practice, the government had earlier decided to set nurses' wages at 37% of doctors' salaries.

As regards the rise in pensions from Jan 1, Gulyás said the government was confident that the 6% increase would be significantly outpace inflation this year. He added that pensions were also increased last year -- when inflation was very high -- by a total of 18.5%. The wages of law enforcement employees rose by 79,500 forints on average, the minister said, following a pay rise of 116,000 forints on average in 2022. The value of the work of law enforcement officers, he said, was shown by the fact that Hungary was one of the safest countries in the world, he said, adding that soldiers' wages increased by 11 percent on average on Jan 1.

Speaking about family subsidies, he said the child-care benefit increased to 373,000 forints and the child-care benefit of university students increased to 186,000 forints for undergraduates and to 228,200 for master's students. He added that the new rules of the system of family subsidies had taken effect from Jan 1, and these were expected to have a positive impact on the property market, especially in smaller settlements.

Gulyás said the government's economic policy would meet the challenges of inflation and sustaining real wage increases, while the "spectacular" increase in teachers' salaries may contribute a higher quality of public education.

GULYÁS: 'INCONCEIVABLE' HUNGARY TO BE STRIPPED OF EU PRESIDENCY

"It is inconceivable" that Hungary could be deprived of its EU presidency in the second half of the year, Gergely Gulyás told a government press briefing. But, he added, Hungary would be "doing the European Union a favour" by providing "a uniform government, with leadership skills and experience..." The rotating presidency "is symbolic", and the Hungarian government "doesn't attach too much significance to it, but it will do a decent job," the head of the PM's Office added.

Concerning the government's negotiations with the European Commission on frozen community funding, Gulyás said he was "fundamentally optimistic" but "there can be no compromise over migration and child protection." "We are negotiating on the other areas and we trust that we can strike an agreement," he said. "Several billion euros" could be obtained even without agreement on the two contested issues, he said, adding that a "raw power struggle was taking place". "They don't like the Hungarian government because of those two headings and they will only give us money when they think they have to."

Concerning the upcoming European parliamentary elections, Gulyás said that "despite differences in political views, Hungary would likely end up with 21 MEPs able to promote

Hungary's interests". He added that today, however, opposition MEPs were working "to put the commission in a position" in which it could refuse to forward funds to Hungary. "MEPs of Hungary's leftist parties are in a clear and sharp opposition to Hungary's interest," he insisted.

GULYÁS: UKRAINE AID SHOULD BE SEPARATED FROM EU BUDGET

Hungary "is not against supporting Ukraine, as we have provided support indirectly, both bilaterally and on an EU basis," Gergely Gulyás told a government press briefing. The Hungarian government, he added, had suggested that the issue should be separated from the EU budget and aid should be provided on a bilateral basis. Asked about a possible Hungary-Ukraine summit, he said Transcarpathian Hungarians should be on its agenda, because "they have not been restored [their] rights before the first amendment to Ukraine's education law". Asked whether Hungarian tensions with Ukraine could be eased, the head of the PM's Office said he could not exclude that possibility. The Hungarian government "has the constitutional obligation to strive for good neighbourly and international relations", while it also has "a special interest to Transcarpathian Hungarians". Concerning a possible meeting between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Gulyás quoted

the prime minister as saying that he would not exclude the possibility of such talks "if they have a point ... if progress could be made in terms of understanding one another's positions or moving towards peace."

GULYÁS: POLAND DEVELOPMENTS MIRROR 'BRUSSELS DOUBLE STANDARDS'

On the subject of measures by the new Polish government, Gergely Gulyás advised voters "to consider carefully how they vote". "If anyone has had doubts about the unfair and hypocritical double standards which rule Brussels, it is enough to have a look at developments in Poland..." "The Hungarian government considers that one of the great weakness of the current EU is that it interferes in domestic affairs," the head of the PM's Office told a government press briefing. Gulyás noted that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his newly appointed Polish counterpart, Donald Tusk, had not held a bilateral meeting in recent times but they had met at the recent EU summit. He also said that Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico had said on a recent visit to that Slovakia stood by Hungary in Brussels, but "they also need Hungary to stand up for Slovakia".

Commenting on Visegrad Group cooperation, he said its four member states had several joint interests despite differences in political opinion, so "there is scope for pragmatic

cooperation". He expressed hope that the next V4 meeting could take place in the first half of 2024.

Asked about Ursula von der Leyen's prospects, Gulyás said the current European Commission president had a high chance of remaining in her position.

Commenting on Sweden's NATO accession, he said "it appears that this is not as important to the Swedes as it is to the NATO secretary general", who projected its accession date to be in the first half of the year. "Nobody has contacted us about it from Sweden," he added. The government, he said, wanted to avoid Hungary being the last country to ratify Sweden's NATO accession. Some commonly understood concerns must be resolved first, he said, and communication was needed to rebuild trust. He also said that the Turkish parliament had repeatedly announced and then postponed a vote in this matter. "Let's wait and see when the Turks decide," he added. "The more countries, the stronger the force," he said in response to a question on whether Sweden's accession would strengthen NATO. At the same time, he said Sweden's contribution would be "modest", adding there wasn't a single conflict in the world where an individual country's contribution would be decisive, though within the bloc, the power of the US was decisive, he added, and only a few other countries played a significant role.

Commenting on a recent Hungarian visit to the Sahel, he said the African

region was currently one of the deepest sources of migration, and Hungary's position was that help must be taken to where it is needed. The Hungary Helps programme aims at this purpose, he added. In response to another question, he said a military mission in Chad was making good progress.

Commenting on the visit of the Latin patriarch to Hungary, he said the most important subject was how Hungary could effectively help Christians in the Holy Land and the victims of the Israeli-Hamas conflict under the arrangements of the Hungary Helps programme.

Commenting on German farmers' protests, he said his personal view was that green policies launched in the past were currently being forced on people beyond the bounds of common sense. "Imposing a twentieth extra tax on farmers using diesel is obviously difficult to accept," he added. He said Germany was characterised by domestic political instability that the country had never witnessed before, and public opinion of the German chancellor had never been as poor as it was today. "The three-party coalition is marred by disagreements on many issues, and its public support is only around 30%, which would have been inconceivable in the past," he added. Commenting on the EU digital directive entering force in the next month, he said it would be useful and necessary to formulate common European action concerning big-tech companies like Facebook and YouTube.

"At the same time, it should be noted that currently the EU also accepts restrictions on the freedom of speech and some constitutional restrictions that the Hungarian government -- which represents a classic liberal position -- does not find acceptable," he said.

The Hungarian government will be represented in the body reviewing regulations ranging from tax obligations to the "extremely questionable" rules of comment restriction, he said. Asked about this year's mayoral elections, Gulyás said the elections were on the schedule of next week's Fidesz board meeting, and Fidesz would have its own candidate.

In response to a question on the issue of adoption by same-sex couples, Gulyás said a child who did not have a mother and a father was "obviously at a disadvantage". "This is why we try to guarantee this," he added. It can also happen, he noted, that somebody starts a homosexual relationship after the dissolution of a marriage, in which case he or she naturally keeps the right of custody over the child, as does the other parent, in the case of joint custody. Regarding same-sex civil partnerships, he said there are 403 in Hungary at present, adding that the government had no plans to ease adoption rules.

GULYÁS: ECONOMY TO RETURN TO NORMAL FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Last year, both the deficit and the public debt narrowed, Gergely Gulyás,

said, adding that the goal was to achieve the same again this year and return to normal fiscal management, which, he added, had always characterised the Fidesz government in the absence of an external crisis. Even the war taking place in Ukraine no longer had such a harsh and direct effect as it had done last year, the head of the PM's Office told a government press briefing.

Asked about the state-backed purchase of Budapest Airport, Gulyás said the announcement of a deal was "extremely close" and would hopefully take place before the end of February. As soon as the sale and purchase of the airport is concluded, the next stage would be to build a direct rail link between the airport and the city centre, he said.

In response to a question on a possible EU probe into the planned investment of Chinese automotive company BYD in Szeged, and whether it could jeopardise the success of the investment, he said he hoped that the European Commission would "remain on the side of common sense", and there would be no external influence to sever ties between China and Europe.

Regarding the employment of guest workers, the minister said there were clear rules in Hungary: foreign workers can be employed only if a Hungarian is not available for the given job. He said "the regulation precluded the possibility of abuses" as Hungarian applicants must be favoured before hiring guest workers.

In response to a question on neo-Nazi marches expected early in February, he said the right to assemble had clear limits in Hungary: if a demonstration has a purpose that clearly violates human dignity, it can be banned. He added that the Hungarian authorities were cooperating with foreign secret services to filter out extremists from abroad.

Asked about the planned Jewish House of Fates museum, Gulyás noted that there had never been a financial obstacle to opening the institution. The government believed it was the right thing to do to open a museum commemorating the child victims of the Holocaust, he said, adding that the opening of the centre had been impeded by “an unworthy and petty dispute” among Hungarian Jewish organisations. “We are waiting for a consensus,” he said.

FIDESZ MEP: EP RESOLUTION AGAINST HUNGARY ‘POLITICAL BLACKMAIL’

The “pro-Soros” majority of the European Parliament “has adopted another shameful resolution” condemning Hungary, according to a ruling Fidesz MEP. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen’s speech on Wednesday was a “clear confession”, Balázs Hidvéghi said in a video message. Von der Leyen “openly said” that a large part of Hungary’s EU funds was being withheld due to the

country’s migration policy and its child protection law, he said. “That is unacceptable,” he added. Hungary’s government, he said, would continue to stand up against blackmail. “We won’t allow Hungary to be turned into an immigration country,” he said, adding that the government would continue to protect children from “LGBTQ propaganda”.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: VIETNAM OFFERS GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUNGARY’S ECONOMY

Vietnam’s flourishing economy offers great opportunities to export- and investment-oriented Hungary, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said after talks with Vietnamese counterpart Bui Thanh Son in Budapest. Péter Szijjártó noted that Hungary’s annual exports to the South-East Asian country are now worth around 100 million US dollars. Exports have been boosted by government measures that ease the export of poultry products, medical equipment and pharmaceuticals, Szijjártó said. Recent talks on enabling pork exports to Vietnam “are also in the home stretch”, he added. The European Union and Vietnam signed an “ambitious” free trade agreement recently, aimed at scrapping 99% of tariffs by 2030, he said. The Hungarian and Vietnamese government are slated to sign 14 agreements in the coming days, Szijjártó said. The minister said

the “most important” among those agreements would be the one on foreign policy cooperation, as both countries were pro-peace and wished to aid war-torn countries. “We believe in civilised cooperation between East and West,” he said.

Hungary and Vietnam will also sign cooperation agreements in culture and water management, which may contribute to the export of domestic technologies, Szijjártó said. The two countries will also step up cooperation against international crime, contributing to security in both countries, he said. Universities will also conclude a total of 10 agreements based on the cooperation currently offering government grants to 900 Vietnamese students in Hungary.

ORBÁN MEETS LATIN PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met in Budapest Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem for talks on aid to Christians in the Middle East. The prime minister’s press office said Orbán and the patriarch agreed that hostilities that result in the disappearance of Christian Communities in the Holy Land must be avoided. Hungary will continue to provide humanitarian aid and assistance to support religious activities that contribute to the survival of Christian communities in the Middle East, Orbán said at the talks.

FIDESZ MEP: EP REPORT ON NATL PARLIAMENTS IGNORES REAL PROBLEMS

A report on the role of national parliaments in scrutinising national governments approved by the European Parliament “fails to address the real problems” faced by national assemblies, owing to the “expansive interpretation of the EU treaties”, an MEP of ruling Fidesz has said. The report, approved by MEPs with 453 votes in favour, 85 against and 95 abstentions, calls for national parliaments to take a bigger role in “the implementation of a national period for budgetary and economic policy dialogue”. It also proposes that MEPs, EU commissioners and the sitting presidency of the Council of the EU should debate EU affairs with the MPs of member states and candidate countries each year.

Fidesz MEP László Trócsányi said in a statement that the report focused on institutional reforms aimed at centralisation, such as giving the EP the general power to initiate legislation and expanding the body’s powers in connection with setting up investigative committees. He said EU institutions often overstepped the scope of the treaties and undermined the powers of member states and their parliaments. He cited the example of higher education, noting it was a national competency, yet the European Commission “feels it is authorised to penalise university students and

professors by freezing the funds for the Erasmus and Horizon Europe programmes”.

TEACHER TRADE UNION PDSZ REJECTS GULYAS REMARKS ON TEACHERS’ WAGE INCREASE

The PDSZ teacher trade union has said it “resolutely rejects” the head of the prime minister’s office’s remarks concerning the wage hike for teachers. Gergely Gulyás told a government briefing today that besides left-wing parties, the teacher trade unions had been “the main enemies” of wage increase.

PDSZ said in a statement that the current 32.2% wage increase and the fact that it had been offered to teachers of vocational schools, too, had been the result of strike talks, strike days, and the series of protests held around the country. PDSZ and the PSZ trade union pursued strike talks for more than two years, it added. The teachers’ wage increase was the outcome of joint action taken by students, teachers and parents standing up for their rights, and the European Union also played a key role by forcing the government to fulfil its promises under the arrangements of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme EFOP PLUS, PDSZ said.

“Had the trade unions not raised their voice in connection with the shortage of teachers and insufficient teacher wages, the government

would not have had the political will to mend the holes in the educational system,” PDSZ added. The teacher wage increase was only the first step towards a significant improvement in the quality of education, as it was the most basic way to stop the brain drain and make the teaching profession attractive, it added.

GOVT SPOX: OVER 1.5 M NATL CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRES RETURNED BY DEADLINE

A total of 1,518,455 people returned the government’s latest National Consultation questionnaires by the Wednesday deadline, expressing their opinion on several issues that fundamentally affects the country’s sovereignty, the government spokeswoman said. Some 84% of respondents returned the questionnaire by mail, Alexandra Szentkirályi said. “Hungarians, unlike other EU citizens, have had the opportunity to give their opinion on issues seriously affecting them, such as Brussels’ migration plan, weapon deliveries, Ukraine’s EU membership and Ukrainian GMO grain,” she said.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: AUDI HUNGÁRIA BREAKS TEN- YEAR OUTPUT RECORD

Audi Hungária turned out 177,000 cars at its production base in Győr, in north-western Hungary, last year, breaking an output record, Péter Szijjártó,

minister of foreign affairs and trade, said. Szijjártó noted that Mercedes was continuously expanding its plant in Kecskemét, in central Hungary, and BMW was constructing a base in Debrecen, in the east of the country. "As a result, Hungary has become part of an exclusive elite club with China and Germany, where all three of Germany's premium car brands have an independent base," Szijjártó said on Facebook. While "some Western European politicians are constantly spreading the ideology aimed at splitting the Chinese and European economies, reality is thankfully completely different: after the big Chinese and Korean battery plants serving the German companies the world's biggest Electric vehicle maker, China's BYD is also bringing its first European plant to Hungary," the minister said.

GOVT OFFICIAL CALLS FOR FORESTERS' INVOLVEMENT IN EU DECISIONS

Forestry experts should be involved in European Union decisions on forest management, the state

secretary for agriculture and rural development told a conference in Berlin. Speaking at the European Symposium of the German Forestry Council in Berlin, Zsolt Feldman presented the results of Hungarian forest management in terms of climate change and in bringing the public closer to the issue. Feldman said EU legislation proposals on forestry were often made in forums on environmental protection or energy management rather than agriculture. While forestry is key to protection against climate change, European efforts must coordinate various sectors' interests in order to be successful, he said.

Feldman rejected "attempts to bring forestry issues under European competency", and presented Hungary's results designed to create broad public support for the issue, such as projects to plant trees in localities and the "Forest of newborns" programme. The area of forests has doubled in Hungary over the past century, he said. The symposium hosted delegations from Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Poland, aiming to strengthen the cooperation of countries with

large areas of woodlands in the European decision-making process, the agriculture ministry said in a statement.

HOUSE OF MUSIC IN THE GUARDIAN'S LIST OF MOST INSPIRING DESTINATIONS IN EUROPE

Readers of Britain's The Guardian have voted to include Hungary's House of Music in Budapest in the list of Europe's most inspiring destinations. Apart from the House of Music, built as part of Budapest's Liget Project, the list includes such famous tourist destinations as the Roman Amphitheatre in Spain, Hadrian's Wall in the UK and Denmark's Kronborg Castle. "We are extremely proud of yet another award to the Hungarian House of Music, which reflects the success of our endeavours ... to make Budapest's City Park a prime destination for tourists visiting Budapest," Városliget Zrt, the site's operator, said. The House of Music was designed by Japanese star architect Sou Fujimoto and opened in January 2022.