

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Sándor Palace

President Katalin Novák welcomes Vietnamese PM Phạm Minh Chính at Sándor Palace

UPCOMING EVENTS

LMP co-leader Péter Ungár addresses party congress in Budapest

Day of Hungarian culture marked

TOP STORY

'NO MONEY IN THE WORLD' WILL CHANGE KEY POLICIES

Viktor Orbán has said in an interview that there was “no money in the world” that would get Hungary to allow migrants in and “take the country away from us” or convince Hungarians “to hand over their children to LGBTQ activists”.

The prime minister told public radio that Hungary would not allow circumstances to develop as they had done in western EU member states, citing “the threat of terror, crime and parallel societies”. He said there was also “no money in the world” that could convince Hungarians “to hand over their children to LGBTQ activists”. Raising children “is exclusively the job” of the family and parents. “Nobody can take this away from them, especially not the school,” he added. “They [the EU] cannot blackmail us with money in these matters because they are more important than money,” he said. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen had stated clearly that EU funds were not being handed over to Hungarians for two reasons: because Hungary refused to allow migrants in and refused to allow LGBTQ activists among their children, Orbán said, adding that by any means possible, including financial pressure, the EU wanted Hungary to change its laws, “but this won’t work”. He also said that the EP election would be about the issues of “migration, our families and the war”.

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ORBÁN: NATIONAL CONSULTATION IMPORTANT FOR TAKING JOINT ACTION

The National Consultation public survey is an important exercise in taking joint action as well as addressing specific issues, the prime minister told public radio. "Deep national thinking is very strong in Hungary," Viktor Orbán said, adding that Hungarian national feeling of belonging went back a thousand years, whereas in Western Europe this was one or two hundred years. He said more than 1.5 million people returned questionnaires "because they thought it important for the country". It was better, he said, to assert interests together than separately. "The consultation proves that we are still a strong country and a strong nation", he said, adding that this message "will be heard in Brussels".

The prime minister said that after a difficult 2023, "we're looking ahead to an easier, better year this year". Referring to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, with "skyrocketing energy prices and sky-high inflation", Orbán said: "We were tormented by the year 2023, but ... we got through it". He said Hungarians had "solved this together" and this strengthened their ability to face the challenges of global economic competition which raises the quality of life in the country, "and makes us a successful nation".

Hungary's economy, he said, was "crisis-proof even without European

Union funding" and had come through the hardest of periods. When EU money was "most needed" after the pandemic and during the current period of rising energy prices, it had not been forthcoming, he said. Nevertheless, Hungary solved both crises, he added. "It's good if there is EU money", but the funding was not "a large amount relative to the size of the Hungarian economy," he said, adding that the EU money acted as a way of "speeding things up", noting the wage hikes for teachers which could now be implemented over three years as opposed to six.

The prime minister went on to say that inflation had been pushed down from 25% to around 6% without EU help, and Hungary's "future is bright" in terms of growth prospects this year. "We'll be in the front row of European comparisons too," he added. He said the risk of a rebound in inflation in Hungary was "minimal". The real question, he added, was whether economic growth would match the target rate and whether the central bank would be able to reduce interest rates at the planned pace.

Growth must be the common goal of the government and the central bank, and help must be offered to get investors to carry out more developments and create jobs, Orbán said. This, he added, required lower lending rates which, given the protection of the forint, the central bank would be able to guarantee this year. The prime minister noted that Márton Nagy, the minister of economic

development, is responsible for economic growth, so "he must arrange it". He confirmed that pensioners would again receive a 13th month pension this year. Every year "there is a serious discussion" with the finance minister as to whether the 13th month pension would be paid in one sum as pensioners expected. "This discussion has already been held this year", he said.

Meanwhile, Orbán said he expected 2024 to be "a difficult and busy year" in terms of diplomacy. Preparations, he said, had started "for a long march", which included Hungary taking up the presidency of the Council of the European Union from July 1 to the end of the year, and this involved "intensive diplomacy". He said Slovak President Robert Fico's recent visit to Budapest had been a highlight, and he noted that he had met Fico 33 times over the years. He added that he was glad to see "an old soldier" return because it is always easier to work together with a well-known partner than with a new one. "New partners are not bad, either, as cooperation with the new Romanian prime minister offers great opportunities to improve bilateral ties," he added. He said he had many disputes with Fico in the past but they have almost all been resolved. "By now Slovak-Hungarian relations basically only have positive elements," he added.

The number of border crossings on the Slovak-Hungary border have increased from around 10 to 40 over the past ten-plus years, he noted.

Slovakia and Hungary, he added, agreed that cross-border life was special, and it was much better if people were connected rather than separated. A working team has been set up to prepare proposals on how to further improve the quality of life for people living near the border, he added. "It was a good start of the year; we could hardly have received a more promising guest than the Slovak prime minister," he said.

Commenting on a visit by the prime minister of Vietnam, he said the rise of Asian countries was not a temporary trend, and the West must understand that it was not alone in dictating economic rules. He said reports put Vietnam, with 100 million inhabitants, among the ten fastest developing countries in the world. Hungary has long-standing relations with Vietnam and cooperation is good between the two countries, he added. Asians, he said, were good at trade, and efforts were now under way to attract investments to Hungary. Meanwhile, Orbán said he would receive the Moldavian prime minister in Budapest next week.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY CREATING ENERGY LINKS WITH NEIGHBOURING STATES

Hungary is creating new energy links with neighbouring states, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, said in Athens, adding that the past period had shown that the

more links there were, the more secure the respective countries involved were. Energy supply in future would rely on producing large amounts of cheap and green electricity, and nuclear energy was indispensable to this aim, Szijjártó said at a meeting of a working group on strengthening energy connections in Central and South-Eastern Europe (CESEC). Hopefully, central and south-eastern European countries would unite to combat "discrimination and ideological attacks against nuclear energy", he added. After the expansion of Hungary's sole nuclear power station in Paks, nuclear capacity in Hungary would increase from 2,000 megawatts to 4,400 megawatts by the beginning of the next decade, the minister said.

The regional energy network, he said, must be expanded as soon as possible so as to maximise the benefits of mutual developments. He referred to major infrastructure development projects which the government and several neighbouring countries had agreed to. The capacity of the 400 kilovolt transmission line between Hungary and Serbia will be doubled, and construction of a new high-voltage connection between Hungary and Romania is in the planning phase, he noted.

Szijjártó said Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia had requested EU funding for a new central European regional electricity exchange, and agreements with the relevant companies have already been signed. It is planned that the system will be operational

by the end of the first half of this year, he added. Such projects, he added, not only served the interests of Serbian, Romanian, Hungarian and Slovenian citizens, but the interests of all European citizens too.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY EU PRESIDENCY DETERMINED TO ACT AGAINST ILLEGAL MIGRATION

Hungary is determined to take resolute action against illegal migration during its upcoming presidency of the Council of the European Union, the foreign minister said, adding that new migration routes were emerging and pressure was increasing on south-eastern Europe. Szijjártó and Greek counterpart Giorgos Gerapetritis reviewed the main challenges facing Europe, "including the most serious challenge: the growing pressure of migration", the ministry said in a statement. "My Greek counterpart informed me that new routes are taking shape in south-eastern Europe, including migration to Greece," he said. "Greece faces growing pressure and new migration routes," he added. "This makes it all the more important for Hungary to take determined action against illegal migration during its presidency of the EU," he said, adding that Budapest could rely on the support of Athens regarding important issues connected with Hungary's upcoming EU presidency. "We were in agreement that protecting the external EU borders is vitally important, and we

must not give up the basic principle of our sovereignty; only we are entitled to decide who can enter our respective countries and with whom we are willing to live together," he said.

He also said that Hungary and Greece shared the position that security challenges facing Europe, including an escalation of the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East, must be avoided. "Preventing escalation in both armed conflicts is vitally important to both of us," he said.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said that like Hungary, Greece was also sensitive when it came to respecting nationality rights and specifically those of the ethnic Greek communities living beyond its borders. "We were in agreement that the issue of national minority rights must not be allowed to be suppressed by claims that they are bilateral issues," he said. "Respect for the rights of ethnic minorities is an international legal issue, one that belongs to the rule of law, and therefore it must be kept on the international agenda," he added.

Szijjártó also met the energy ministers of Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. He said the security of energy supplies was vitally important. New resources and transport routes must be involved, and "it is unavoidable that Greece will be a transit country" for natural gas supplies to Hungary, he added. He welcomed the expansion of the capacity of a natural gas link between Bulgaria and Greece, from the current 3 billion cubic metres to 5 billion cubic metres next year, and added that Greek LNG ports

would become available as a result. "New transport routes through Greece can be considered for the security of natural gas supplies to Hungary," he said. "We have completed a successful visit in Greece, establishing that new energy routes serving the security of our energy supplies have been created, and we have strengthened our cooperation as allies in matters that are important to Hungary's security," he added.

ORBÁN: NEW WORLD ECONOMIC ORDER OFFERS GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

In Asia's "unstoppable rise", Hungary spies "huge opportunities in this new world economic order", Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said after meeting Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh in his office, where the delegations of the two countries signed several cooperation agreements.

Orbán said Hungary's Eastern opening policy was rooted "in the idea that the world would change rapidly and the power relations would change, requiring a response from Hungary to the rise of Asia." He said his Vietnamese counterpart's visit was "crucial" for Hungary because he came from a "continent growing unstoppably and Vietnam is developing in an unprecedented way", so it was "easy to predict" that Vietnam would emerge as one of the winners of the coming era. "Such transformations herald opportunities as well as risks. We see

the new world economic era as an enormous opportunity for Hungary, since Hungarians are an Eastern people by origin. We belong to the West but came from the East; we understand that world, and its values are important to us: respect, equality, and service to our family and nation," the prime minister said.

Orbán said that in the past decade Asian countries had caught up and left behind Western countries that were traditionally active in Hungary. "That trend is expected to continue," he said, expressing hope that Vietnam would join the ranks of successful countries in Hungary, bilateral trade would grow and that "we will also invest in each other's countries". Orbán added that since the "political position of the two countries is very similar, there is a good chance of that happening". "The two countries are also trying to find their places in similarly complicated situations", according to their national interests, and dialogue would help, he added. "It comes from the similarity of our situations that we see the issue of peace similarly, and that of war, too. Vietnam has made a living from winning its wars, which commands respect, and Hungarians have made a living from surviving their defeats, which is also a virtue."

Orbán congratulated the Vietnamese government on creating 28 million jobs in 5 years. They have also brokered a "fantastic agreement" on free trade with the European Union, and "since Hungary is an export- and investment-oriented country, that

is very important for us." Under the agreement, 99% of bilateral trade between the EU and Vietnam will become tariff-free by 2030, he added.

Hungary will use its EU presidency in the second half of 2024 to try to convince member states to ratify the investment protection agreement between the EU and Vietnam if they hadn't already done so, he said. "I also encouraged the prime minister to support as large and as varied Vietnamese investments in Hungary as possible," he said. Trade between the two countries is on the rise, but they should be complemented with investments "so we can also manufacture in each other's countries and participate in each other's scientific work and research." Currently 900 Vietnamese students study in Hungary, he added.

Orbán said that traditional agricultural and health-care exports complemented with cultural university-level cooperation and the opportunities to boost investments amounted to a "big package", and cooperation significant in volume, depth and value. "As both countries have seen war", Hungary and Vietnam shared the same views on peace, he said. Vietnam, just as Hungary, saw peace as the most important asset in foreign policy, he said. That was why the two countries agreed in respect of conflicts around the world and found cooperation easy in international forums, he said. "We shall stand by peace separately and, if need be, together." He said he hoped the war

in Hungary's neighbourhood would be suspended with a ceasefire and concluded with a peace agreement as soon as possible.

Orbán thanked Pham Minh Chinh for his visit, noting that they would hold a Vietnamese-Hungarian business and economic forum together on Friday.

NAGY: EU MUST TAKE STEPS TO STRENGTHEN NEW INDUSTRIES, COMPETITIVENESS

Márton Nagy, the minister of economic development, addressing the World Economic Forum in Davos, discussed new economic trends, the dynamism of change to new industries and the need for adaptability. Nagy said Europe was slow at adapting to new trends while significant structural changes were taking place in the world. Asian countries, especially China, had responded well to the global challenges of recent times and strengthened their economies, but the EU, by seeking a return to Maastricht criteria, could significantly harm its growth and the competitiveness of member states, he said. He said Hungary had learnt that economic growth and peace hinged on international relations based on mutual respect. Hungary's goal, he added, was to maximise the advantages of its good geographical position and become a meeting point for Eastern and Western economies and technologies. Nagy praised the achievements of the Hungarian prime minister's policy

of opening to the East, noting that Hungary had managed to increase the proportion of direct investments from the East from 10% in 2010 to 34% today.

The government strategy, he said, was beneficial for the national economy, with exports expected to rise to 100% of GDP by 2030, while FDI was projected to double from the current 100 billion euros, Nagy said. Additionally, the multiplier effect of FDI was also beneficial, he said, because through horizontal and vertical integration it enhanced research and development activities in cooperation with universities, while strengthening Hungarian businesses by linking them to supply chains in increasingly value-added positions, he said. Also, the big expansion of logistics opportunities was expected to result in the sector expanding from 5% to 10% of GDP by 2030, he added.

He said Hungary was pursuing its own strategy and aimed to be a bridgehead between East and West. The development of the vehicle industry was a good example, he said, with German carmakers like Audi establishing links with Chinese battery makers such as CATL in Hungary, he added. Also, Chinese electric carmaker BYD is launching its first European production in Hungary, he said. Hungary was making every effort to enhance competitiveness, and he argued that the EU should also take urgent steps to strengthen new industries and competitiveness instead of seeking a return to the fiscal and financial criteria of 30 years ago.

TOP COURT STRIKES DOWN SEVERAL PROVISIONS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE LAW

Hungary's top court on Friday struck down several provisions of the law that regulates the ownership and operation of Hungarian castles, mansions, and manor houses. The law was adopted by parliament in December 2023, and President Katalin Novák asked the constitutional court to review it, arguing that the 2023 law was at odds with the 2011 law on national assets, and certain provisions of the law violated the requirement of legal certainty and clarity. Further, she submitted that the relationship between the two laws was unclear. The 2023 law establishes significantly lighter regulations for some of the

specially protected property than the 2011 law on national assets, and rules on the transfer of such property "do not correspond to the provisions of the Fundamental Law".

The court said legislators must take the interest of the state related to the protection of national assets into consideration and ensure transparent management. It added that the public interest should be taken into account when national property is transferred to a private entity and should be made use of in the spirit of a national property. Further, when offloading national assets, parliament must make it clear, item by item, which assets may fall under the scope of the regulation, and who may obtain the right to acquire them, the court said. Also, tenders related to property acquisition should be made public, it said. Compared with the 2011 law, the new law allowed

lighter regulation for specially protected assets, it said. The court sent back the legislation to MPs for reconsideration.

FIRST HYDROGEN FILLING STATION OPENS IN HUNGARY

The first hydrogen filling station in Hungary, operated by Linde Gáz Magyarország, has started operating in the south of the capital. Hydrogen fuel cell buses are being put into service in the capital and a number of other big cities around the country in the framework of a pilot project of the Hungarian Mobility Development Agency (HUMDA), Zsófia Koncz, the energy state secretary, told a conference organised by the Hungarian Hydrogen Technology Association.