

PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Péter Komka

Spartan Race international competition in Salgótarján

UPCOMING EVENTS

**EU foreign affairs,
trade ministers meet**

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

TOP STORY

FIDESZ MEP: EP 'MOVING TOWARDS EXTREMISM'

The European Parliament has moved "towards extremism, transgressing the most fundamental democratic rules" and attacking even the European Commission for negotiating with Hungary on certain issues, an MEP of ruling Fidesz has said.

Balázs Hidvéghi told public radio on Sunday that it was "detrimental" to European cooperation that "the EP refuses to accept that Hungary's position is different from theirs on the hottest issues such as the war or aid to Ukraine, or moral topics like LGBT propaganda and child protection." He suggested that differing views should be tolerated, adding that threatening Hungary with stripping the country of its voting rights in the EU "beats everything". He added, however, that procedures to deny Hungary its voting rights could be initiated by one third of the EC or of member states, while the European Council should pass a unanimous decision. "There is no realistic chance for that," he said. Hidvéghi slammed the EP for its "debates characterised by defamation, unfounded, extremist remarks and complete rejection of different positions", saying those phenomena "clearly show the workings of the Soros network". "This network has infiltrated European institutions ... through various organisations and activists and is increasingly aggressive against differing opinions..." he said.

HUNGARY, UKRAINE FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING FINALISED

The foreign ministers of Hungary and Ukraine will meet in Uzhhorod (Ungvár) on Jan 29, the Hungarian foreign minister said on Facebook on Friday. Péter Szijjártó said he talked with the head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Andriy Yermak, over the phone, and discussed with him the most important issues in the two countries' bilateral ties. The Ukrainian foreign minister and Yermak will also be part of the delegation, Szijjártó said. Szijjártó said he hoped to touch on all the important issues in bilateral relations, especially that of the "curbed rights of the Hungarian minority and the long-term future of bilateral relations."

SZIJJÁRTÓ ADDRESSES HUNGARIAN-VIETNAMESE BUSINESS FORUM

Predictable partnerships based on mutual respect such as the cooperation between Hungary and Vietnam are all the more important in the current turbulent times, Péter Szijjártó, the minister of foreign affairs and trade, told a Hungarian-Vietnamese business forum in Budapest on Friday. Recent global crises such as the pandemic, the ongoing war in Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East disrupted the existing supply chains, caused

energy prices to soar and have affected maritime trade, the minister noted. Such turbulent times, Szijjártó said, gave even greater value to partnerships like the more than 70-year cooperation between Hungary and Vietnam. He welcomed that the two countries had further strengthened their cooperation in recent days.

Szijjártó said that under the new agreements signed by Hungary and Vietnam, cooperation in foreign affairs was set to become stronger. The two countries will boost their cultural ties, step up joint action against international crime, and Hungary is set to increase exports of its water management technologies to the Southeast Asian country, he added. Szijjártó also welcomed that there were no unresolved political issues between Hungary and Vietnam, "only cooperation based on mutual benefits". He said everything was in place for cooperation between Hungarian and Vietnamese businesses to be successful as well, urging the business executives in attendance to make use of this opportunity.

MINISTRY: DEVELOPMENT OF VIETNAM-EU TIES IN HUNGARY'S INTEREST

As the next president of the Council of the European Union, Hungary has a vested interest in the continued development of the EU's relations with Vietnam, the ministry of EU affairs said on Saturday. In a statement, the ministry said Barna Pál Zsigmond, the

parliamentary state secretary of EU affairs, paid an official visit to Vietnam, where he outlined the priorities of the coming Hungarian EU presidency. At his talks, Zsigmond said Hungary saw the future of EU member states in connectivity rather than Europe's isolation. Vietnam and Hungary both have an interest in international connectivity and in the broadest possible cooperation between themselves as well as between EU and ASEAN member states, he said. Zsigmond said Hungary-Vietnam ties could gain new momentum in the future, arguing that the Southeast Asian country was back on a growth path following the end of the pandemic, opening the door to opportunities for cooperation in every area. The state secretary said both countries were pro-peace when it came to the war in Ukraine. Zsigmond's talks also touched on the investment protection agreement between the EU and Vietnam, and he assured his partners that during its EU presidency, Hungary would urge member states that have yet to ratify the agreement to do so. At his talks with the deputy minister of public safety, Zsigmond discussed cooperation between the two countries' police forces and their fight against organised crime.

Meanwhile, Zsigmond talked about bilateral academic and university ties with the deputy head of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam and the rector of Vietnam National University, the ministry said. At the academy, Zsigmond gave a talk about

Hungarian-Vietnamese relations and the possible joint responses to global challenges. He said the Stipendium Hungaricum programme offers grants to 200 Vietnamese students each year, adding that there are currently 900 Vietnamese students pursuing studies in Hungary. The ministry said Zsigmond also held talks with the rector of the Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology. He also discussed the development of business relations with the deputy director of the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the head of Business Association of Overseas Vietnamese (BAOOV), leaders of the local representations of Hungarian pharmaceutical companies Gedeon Richter and EGIS, as well as the delegations of the Central and Eastern European Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam and EuroCham.

FIDESZ MEP: SOCIAL DEMOCRAT MEP 'CROSSED A LINE' BY SUGGESTING HUNGARY BE 'SILENCED'

Social Democrat MEP Katarina Barley "crossed a line" by proposing that political opponents should be silenced, Balázs Hidvéghi, an MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz, said in a video on Facebook on Saturday. Hidvéghi said that Barley, "who in the past wanted Hungarians to be starved", was now calling for the suspension of Hungary's voting rights in the European Council "solely because our views on migration, child

protection and Ukraine differ from the mainstream". "You disagree with someone and then you want to take away their right to speak and vote? That is a dictatorship," Hidvéghi said in a clip of his address in a European Parliament debate this week. "No, Ms. Barley. Having a different opinion is no blackmail. No, no, no; it's having a different opinion. You just have to live with that in a democracy," he said.

NÉMETH: 'TAKING LINGUISTIC SELF-DEFENCE OUT OF PUTIN'S HANDS' UP TO UKRAINE

Hungary firmly condemns Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, but unless the country "takes the weapon of linguistic self-defence out of the Russian president's hands", he will get to hold on to that "nuclear option", the head of parliament's foreign affairs committee said on Friday. Showing generosity to minorities regarding the use of their mother tongue could give Ukraine "a real European future", Zsolt Németh said at the presentation of a book on the survival of the country's Transcarpathian Hungarian community. Noting the coming talks between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, he said such an approach would benefit not just Transcarpathian Hungarians but all people of Ukraine.

Németh said the recent amendments to Ukraine's minority law were "a good start, but it needs to go farther". He added that the

Venice Commission, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the bilateral talks held so far made it clear that Ukraine must restore the state of affairs that pertained in 2014. He said the current law did not guarantee cultural autonomy, collective rights, parliamentary representation or the possibility of using the mother tongue as an official language. Moreover, he added, the law did not ensure the legal institution of national minority education, the use of minority languages for place names or the free use of symbols.

He noted that the CoE Monitoring Committee was set to debate whether Ukraine's amendment of its minority law is enough to meet the country's international obligations. Ukraine could make the most progress in becoming "a real European country" by ensuring linguistic and cultural equality for minorities, Németh said.

BÓKA: ORBÁN 'INDISPENSABLE' PLAYER OF CONSERVATIVE CAMP - LE MONDE

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is an "indispensable" player of the conservative camp, and European conservative cooperation is only possible with his Fidesz party, the minister for European affairs told the French daily Le Monde. In the interview published on Friday, János Bóka said Orbán had tried and failed to convince the heads of other member states to abandon the "questionable

European strategy based on the belief that Ukraine would win the war” and to reach consensus. When that didn’t happen, Orbán left the room to express his rejection of the start of accession talks with Ukraine, Bóka said. At the same time, Bóka said Hungary welcomes “some member states” and the EC’s work on a proposal to separate aid for Ukraine from the EU budget. “We propose to adopt [the budget for support of Ukraine] based on an annual, unanimous vote.” Meanwhile, Bóka said that Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó was slated to meet his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, on Jan 29, to prepare a meeting between Orbán and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, “if there is hope of such a meeting bringing substantial progress.”

FINMIN: BUDAPEST MAYOR’S REFUSAL TO PAY CITY’S TAXES ‘UNPRECEDENTED’

Finance Minister Mihály Varga, in an interview with the online edition of business daily Világgazdaság, said it was “unprecedented” that while Budapest residents and businesses meet their tax obligations, the city’s mayor “ignores them”. The solidarity contribution is paid by 724 cities, including Budapest, Hungary’s richest city, Varga said in the interview published on Saturday, adding that the tax was meant to aid the 1,800 localities that have a more modest tax capacity. The minister noted a ruling by the Kúria, Hungary’s supreme

court, declaring that Budapest could not be even partially exempt from its obligation to pay its taxes. Varga said if the Budapest city council failed to meet its obligations, the government “will follow the given legal provisions along the clear decisions taken by the judiciary”.

As regards inflation, Varga said the government estimates an average annual inflation rate of 5.2% for 2024. He said such a rate still carried risks, so it was crucial to keep inflation at bay and strive for sustainable economic growth. The minister said he expects to see substantial real wage growth this year along with a decline in interest rates, leading to rising retail sales. He said international estimates put Hungary among the fastest-growing EU countries this year, adding that the government put this year’s GDP growth at 3.6%. He said he considered it “realistic” for the government to pay another pension premium in November.

Concerning Hungary’s EU funds, he said the country received 520 billion forints’ (EUR 1.4bn) worth of EU money by Jan 17 and the government was now working on unlocking the remaining funds. Hungary last year received 2,200 billion forints’ worth of EU funds and expects to receive at least 2,000 billion this year, he added. Meanwhile, Varga said the budget’s figures could be maintained, but could be amended if it became necessary later in the year. He said the 2025 budget and tax changes will be passed in the spring.

AGMIN OFFICIAL HAS TALKS AT INTL GREEN WEEK IN BERLIN

Zsolt Feldman, the state secretary for agriculture and rural development, held talks to boost Hungary’s international agricultural ties at the 88th International Green Week and the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture in Berlin, the agriculture ministry said on Sunday. Feldman discussed agricultural cooperation with the agriculture ministers of the German state of Baden-Württemberg and Uzbekistan. He also talked about bilateral agricultural ties with the Bavarian minister and Georgia’s deputy minister. The state secretary discussed opportunities for cooperation on farming technologies with the leaders of the German Agricultural Society and the use of automated machine technologies with the head of the German Raiffeisen Association. Hungary was one of 61 countries displaying their food products to the international food exhibit’s 300,000 visitors, the ministry said.

LANTOS: OVER 21,000 APPLY FOR HOME SOLAR PANEL SUBSIDIES IN FIRST WEEK

More than 21,000 households applied for subsidies for home solar panels and battery storage in the first week of the 75 billion forint (EUR 196.1m) scheme, Energy

Minister Csaba Lantos said in an interview with news portal index.hu published on Saturday. Households may apply for up to 5 million forints in support, covering two-thirds of investment cost, Lantos said. Meanwhile, close to 700 companies that install solar panels and battery storage have had their registrations approved so far, Lantos said. The minister said more than 250,000 homes in Hungary have solar panels installed, almost a quarter more than what was originally expected by 2030. The total capacity of industrial and household solar installations is over 5,600 MW, he said, adding that this could increase to up to 12 GW by the beginning of the next decade.

BAKONDI: MIGRATION INTO EUROPE UP 17% IN 2023

Migration into Europe was up 17% last year compared with 2022, with the European Union seeing some 380,000 illegal entry attempts, György Bakondi, the prime minister's chief domestic security advisor, said on Friday. Migration pressure increased along routes going through Spain, Italy and the Balkans last year, Bakondi told public current affairs channel M1. He said the situation on Hungary's border was deteriorating, with certain areas on the Serbian side having been "controlled by Afghan

crime gangs" by the third quarter of 2023. Migrants even fired at Hungarian police officers "hundreds of times" last year, he added. Meanwhile, Bakondi noted, the EU had approved a migration pact and was mandating resettlement quotas. Also, contrary to the practice followed by Hungary so far, asylum applications are no longer assessed outside the EU's territory, leading to the possible establishment of migrant camps within the bloc, he warned. He said the EU was attempting to blackmail Hungary by withholding funds from the country until it changed its migration policy and child protection regulations.

LMP CONGRESS: UNGÁR CALLS FOR 'ALTERNATIVE' CANDIDATE FOR BUDAPEST MAYOR

The opposition LMP party "wants to show that there could be an alternative political proposal to lead Budapest ... the party seeks a candidate [for Budapest mayor] who is not associated with their political affiliation," LMP co-chairman Péter Ungár said at his party's congress on Saturday. LMP's candidate would "represent the 60% of Budapest residents using public transport" in the long run, and work "to develop rather than shrink services", Ungár said. Budapest needs parks and social housing "rather than skyscrapers and luxury homes", he said, adding that LMP would "not

make concessions" on that subject. Ungár declined to name a candidate, saying that LMP was "not in search of a coat to complete a button", adding that "there is joy in anticipation". Slamming Gergely Karácsony, the incumbent, opposition mayor of Budapest, Ungár suggested Karácsony's priority was "to pose as [PM] Viktor Orbán's victim on Facebook".

Ungár also criticised the other opposition parties in Budapest for "pretending to support cooperation whereas none of them are really eager that it should happen". Ungár insisted that political discourse within the opposition was "about persons rather than content". He said "every election or referendum is about Viktor Orbán, while the opposition sees Ferenc Gyurcsány as the cause of all their problems or the solution to everything and Karácsony as the only hope". Ungár said his party was the only opposition party "that can define itself". LMP is Hungary's only green party, for which "the question if Lake Balaton should be surrounded by concrete" is a greater priority than "whether there is a police cordon around the prime minister's office".

"LMP is familiar with the dangers of GMO," he said, adding that his party would "fight against battery plants in Hungary to the last minute." Ungár added, however, that "the EU is not the source of all good things and markets are not omnipotent". He said LMP was the "only party that has drawn conclusions from the dramatic defeat of the 2022 election" and offered a

“completely different alternative to the unnerving spiritual civil war raging in Hungarian politics”.

PÁRBESZÁD-GREENS CONGRESS DRAWS UP EP LIST

A congress of the opposition Párbeszéd-Greens party on Saturday presented its list of candidates for the upcoming European Parliament elections headed by former MEP Benedek Jávor. The party’s “strong and green” EP list will include parliamentary group leader Tímea Szabó, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony, and party spokesman Richard Barabás, the party told MTI. Párbeszéd-Greens aims to “further promote green values ... based on its Green Minimum Programme.” “We believe that the future cannot be other than green, fair, and socially sensitive,” the party said, adding that they would work to develop Hungary and Europe in line with those values.

OVER 11,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY

Fully 4,366 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 6,879 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 79 people, ORFK said on Sunday.

FOURTH HYDROCARBON WELL STARTS OPERATION IN SE HUNGARY

The fourth well extracting hydrocarbons in Nyékipusztá, in southeast Hungary, started operation on schedule on Thursday, the energy ministry said on Friday. The wells were opened in a bid to increase Hungary’s energy sovereignty and the security of supplies, in a conglomerate of companies with the participation

of energy supplier MVM Group. The wells have so far produced 46 million cubic meters of natural gas and 56,000 cubic meters of light oil, the statement said. Domestic energy resources are a priority for Hungary’s government as a way to boost its energy sovereignty, the ministry said. Hungary’s energy reserves are more than 80% full even halfway through the heating season, the statement noted.

WIZZ AIR PASSENGER NUMBERS ON HUNGARY FLIGHTS REACH 5.2 M IN 2023

The number of passengers on Wizz Air’s Hungary flights rose by 29% to 5.2 million last year, the low-cost airline said on Friday. Overall, passenger numbers of the Hungarian airline climbed 32% to 60.3 million. Wizz Air has 15 aircraft based in Budapest and Debrecen, in eastern Hungary. It flies to 70 destinations in 29 countries from Hungary.