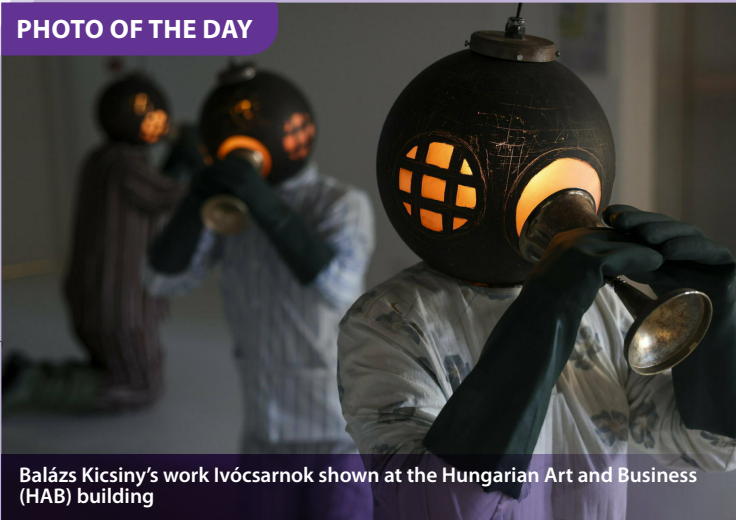


PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTI/Róbert Hegedűs

Balázs Kicsiny's work *Ivócsarnok* shown at the Hungarian Art and Business (HAB) building

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU foreign trade ministers hold informal meeting in Brussels

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

Stats office reports on Nov 2023 wages

TOP STORY

ISRAEL'S SUCCESS 'IN WORLD'S INTEREST'

It is in the interest of the world that Israel's counter-terrorist operations are successful, Péter Szijjártó, said in Brussels, arguing that this would help to ensure that a similar terrorist attack never happened "anywhere ever again".

After a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, the foreign minister told a press conference that Hungary's standpoint was "crystal clear": what triggered the conflict in the Middle East must never be forgotten. "We find Israel's objective to destroy Hamas not only understandable but also a legitimate interest of the world at large... People who use others, especially women and children, as human shields after mounting a terrorist attack should feel shame," he said, calling for a swift return to the path set out by the Abraham Accords, namely the normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab world. Hungary, he said, called for the "immediate and unconditional release of the hostages who are still in captivity", noting that a Hungarian citizen was still being held captive. Hungary is in constant contact with Qatar and another important mediating country, he said, adding he would not name that country due to the sensitivity of hostage negotiations. Szijjártó also emphasised Hungary's position that it found The Hague proceedings against Israel to be "nonsense".

Hungary Matters is an English-language newsletter produced and distributed by the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) with content provided by Duna Media Service Provider exercises copyright over all content. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced, redistributed or transmitted without prior written permission from the publisher, with the exception of copies made by individuals for private use, educational purposes or scholarly research, provided that such transmissions do not exceed the extent justified by the purpose and are not aimed at financial gain, even indirectly, and the source name are indicated at all times.

All rights reserved. Enquiries should be made to the English Help Desk at +361 441 9340
For MTI's real time coverage please visit <http://english.mti.hu>, <http://econews.hu>



HUNGARY TO ALLOW ISRAEL FOOTBALL TEAMS TO PLAY FIXTURES HERE

Israel had asked Hungary to allow its national football teams to play some of its official matches in Hungary, as was the case last year, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said after a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. Israel's European Championship playoff against Iceland will be held in Hungary, as well as the match of the Israeli under-21 team against Poland, and the next official match of the women's national team, he told journalists. Also, Hungary supports Maccabi Haifa playing the next European Conference League match in Hungary. The minister also said that Hungary was a safe country, and anyone who referred to a rise in anti-Semitism in Hungary was "clearly lying".

SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY REFUSES TO BEAR ANY FINANCIAL BURDENS OF UKRAINE WEAPONS DELIVERIES

Hungary will remain uninvolved in weapons deliveries to Ukraine, but will not block other European Union member states from sending them, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Brussels on Monday, adding that the Hungarian government refused to bear any financial burdens of the arms supplies. EU member states "still refuse to abandon their failed strategy,

despite its failures having been proven over the past weeks", Szijjártó told a press conference after a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, according to a ministry statement. "The longer this war goes on, the more people will die and the greater the destruction will be," the minister said.

He criticised as "disappointing" a proposal by the European External Action Service (EEAS) to allocate 5 billion euros within the European Peace Facility towards weapons deliveries this year, which would then be extended on a yearly basis. Szijjártó said that though this was "a notch softer" than the previous proposal, it still signalled a long-term commitment to the war. Under the EEAS's proposal, Hungary's contribution would have to be 23 billion forints (EUR 60.1m).

"Giving new momentum to weapons deliveries is completely unacceptable to Hungary," the minister said. He added, at the same time, that the Hungarian government did not want to block any other member state from supplying weapons to Ukraine, noting that they were accountable to their own electorate. "We certainly won't spend another 23 billion forints of our taxpayers' money over a single year so that others could send weapons to Ukraine, which protracts the war, extends the suffering and brings more death and destruction," he said. Szijjártó said the EU should instead open the channels of communication and help secure a ceasefire and the start of peace talks between the warring sides.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said he and his counterparts had also discussed a thirteenth sanctions package against Russia, "even though the restrictions imposed so far have mainly hurt Europe and haven't moved the conflict any closer to a settlement". "But of course, if one brings this up, as I regularly do, I'm immediately accused of spreading Russian propaganda," he said. Szijjártó said he had warned his counterparts against imposing any sanctions on the nuclear industry, saying Hungary would not support any such measure. He also pointed out that Russia last year became the United States' top supplier of enriched uranium, citing reports of imports worth over one billion dollars.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: PRESSURE TO SATISFY EXPECTATIONS BEHIND LATEST EU SANCTIONS PACKAGE

Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó on Monday said the main driver behind the European Union's latest sanctions package against Russia was that it felt under pressure to be seen to satisfy expectations. Responding to journalists' questions at a press conference after a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels, Szijjártó said several member states "want to be seen as doing something".

Meanwhile, the minister noted that he will meet his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, and the head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Andriy Yermak, in Uzhhorod (Ungvár) on Jan

29, and they will try to cover every difficult issue regarding their bilateral relations. One such aspect, he said, was Hungary's continued refusal to back a new 500 million euro package from the European Peace Facility for weapons deliveries to Ukraine. "Here we said we'd be willing to consider supporting this aid if we got guarantees that Ukraine wouldn't discriminate against Hungarian companies anymore, and didn't cause them problems by pointlessly adding them to the list of international sponsors of war for no reason," Szijjártó said. "We'll see if we can make progress in this matter on January 29."

Concerning the start of Ukraine's EU accession talks, Szijjártó noted that Hungary's position was that the European Council had made a "bad and harmful decision" in December, "for which our country wants to take no responsibility". "And we will stick to that position," he said. "Of course, we understand that they're trying to discredit this position and put pressure on us, either by saying that the position isn't tough enough, or with other things, but this doesn't affect us."

As regards next week's special EU summit, Szijjártó said Hungary "won't be a partner in conflating unrelated things". Meanwhile, the minister said his Israeli counterpart had also taken part in the Foreign Affairs Council's discussion of the Middle East conflict, adding that several member states had expressed criticism of Israel as well as "positions that are very far from that of Hungary". But he said the discussion

had not been heated, and Israel's foreign minister had emphasised the need for cooperation, standing up for his country's national position.

NÉMETH: LEGALITY OF SERBIA ELECTIONS CAN'T BE QUESTIONED

Possible irregularities that may have been experienced in Serbia's early parliamentary elections this month did not reach a level that would warrant questioning the legitimacy of the vote, the head of the Hungarian parliament's foreign affairs committee said in Strasbourg. Zsolt Németh told MTI by phone on day one of the winter session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) that it would be "preferable if certain political forces didn't question the legitimacy of the vote in Serbia just because it was one by a political side that they don't sympathise with".

He praised the recent achievements of the CoE, namely the relations it has fostered with the opposition in Russia and Belarus as well as its contributions to the representation of human and minority rights in Ukraine despite the war. He said that without the CoE's contributions, it would have been impossible to achieve "even the relative improvement" that has been Ukraine's amendment of its minority law. He added that while the amendment was "an important step in an encouraging direction", it was not enough, and more efforts would need to be made to restore the rights

of Transcarpathian Hungarians and other national minorities in Ukraine.

Concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict, Németh said it was "regrettable" that the Hamas terrorist group's attack on Israel could not have been prevented, that there was no progress in ending the war, and that anti-Semitism was on the rise again in Europe.

Meanwhile, Németh said he was hopeful of good cooperation with newly-elected PACE President Theodoros Rousopoulos based on the new president's inaugural speech on Monday. He said he had supported Rousopoulos in the hope that the new president would be a partner in the enforcement of human and minority rights norms. Németh also told MTI that he had been re-elected deputy leader of PACE's conservative group.

DEUTSCH: WITHHOLDING FUNDS FROM HUNGARY 'ILLEGITIMATE'

"Great forces have been mobilised to prevent Hungary from receiving a single euro cent," Tamás Deutsch, an MEP of ruling Fidesz, told public radio. "Brussels's denying Hungary access to community funding is illegitimate," he said. Deutsch said the Hungarian government was open to talks, but added that "there are red lines that we won't cross no matter how strong the pressure." The MEP said illegal migration and the Hungarian government's commitment "to stop the gender ideology madness" were

such subjects. Deutsch insisted that the European Left was seeking to “forcefully overwrite” the decision of Hungarian voters, who had “supported a patriotic, sovereignty policy with a large majority in subsequent democratic elections.”

Referring to recent remarks by Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, Deutsch said she had “admitted” that the funds had been withheld “because Hungary would not reject illegal migration and the gender ideology madness.” “It has been clear for years, that those are the real causes and there is nothing wrong with the rule of law... Withholding the funds is political blackmail,” he said. Deutsch said the upcoming EP elections could bring about a new era, adding that “we must oust Brussels bureaucrats whose power comes from political blackmail.”

HUNGARIAN-TURKISH CULTURAL SEASON UNDER WAY IN TÜRKIYE

The 2024 Hungarian-Turkish cultural season is now under way with concerts given by the Pannon Philharmonic in Istanbul and Ankara on Jan 21 and 22, marking the occasion of the Day of Hungarian Culture, the culture and innovation ministry said on Monday. As well as works by Liszt and Bartok, the orchestra played pieces by Turkish composer Adnan Saygun in the Atatürk Cultural Centre in Istanbul.

Peter Hoppál, government commissioner in charge of the Hungarian-Turkish cultural season,

said in his welcoming speech that one hundred Hungarian cultural programmes are getting under way as part of a celebration of the centenary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. In parallel, Turkish cultural artefacts will be shown in Hungary throughout the year.

Judit Hammerstein, acting director of the Hungarian National Museum, opened the exhibition of Hungarians who built Türkiye at the Istanbul concert hall, a show that will be presented in several Turkish cities. The programmes of the cultural season offer a taste of almost every genre of Hungarian culture in Türkiye, from an exhibition of the collection of the National Bank of Hungary to performances by the Győr Ballet, the Hungarian National Theatre, photographic shows mounted by the Capa Centre, and science conferences. The cultural season opened in Budapest on Dec 18 last year, on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, with the participation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President Katalin Novák and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

AZBEJ: HUNGARY HELPS PROGRAMME REACHING OUT TO NON-CHRISTIANS

The Gaza conflict causes suffering to people of different religions, the state secretary in charge of aid to persecuted Christians told public television, adding that the Hungarian government’s aid programmes were designed to provide

assistance to non-Christians, too. The Hungarian government sends food and medicines, and has donated 400,000 dollars to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem “to help those civilians suffering in Gaza... and help ensure the survival of Christianity in the Holy Land ... but we would not be Christians if we did not help others, too.”

Speaking to public radio, the state secretary slammed western Europe for “keeping a distance” from the issue of the persecution of Christians, adding that “liberals will deny the fact ... of more than 360 million people across the world suffering because of their Christian faith.”

TRÓCSÁNYI WON’T RUN IN EP ELECTIONS

Fidesz MEP László Trócsányi has said he will not run in the 2024 European parliamentary elections, and he will take up the post of rector of the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Trócsányi is a member of the EP Constitutional Affairs Committee and an alternate member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. In a statement on Monday, the one-time justice minister (2014-2019) said he would make use of his experiences and contacts in Brussels when he returns to academia. He said the European Union was in the midst of a crisis and lacked self-confidence because it was in an internal dispute over its identity. “We trust that ... the European parliamentary elections will bring about a positive turn,” he wrote.

CSÁK: DAY OF HUNGARIAN CULTURE ‘CELEBRATION FOR US ALL’

The Day of Hungarian Culture “is a celebration for us all”, Janos Csák, the culture and innovation minister, said at a ceremony held in the basilica of the Pannonhalma Archabbey. He said Hungarian culture was bound together by “our respect and love for God, family, homeland, and our commitment to the cause of Hungarian freedom.” Csák noted that the Day of Hungarian Culture coincided with the consecration of the basilica 800 years ago. Culture, he said, was not only about works of art but it was a way of thinking and “our way of life”. The minister said that culture was built across generations. “We have a mother tongue, one that is built on music and dance, and is visual,” he said.

BUDAPEST MAYOR MARKS DAY OF HUNGARIAN CULTURE

“Hungary’s diverse culture must be made widely available,” Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony said in a Facebook post marking the Day of Hungarian Culture on Monday. Referring to the first decades of the 19th century, Karácsony said it had been a time when “culture ceased to be a privilege and became a public asset... That is the task now: to make it available for the masses and to present it as an experience.” Concerning culture and art, Karácsony said: “No political power should be an unwelcome critic or, even worse, a censor... Art is free, and so are artists; in Budapest they are.” The Day of Hungarian Culture has been observed ever since 1989 to mark the anniversary of the completion of Ferenc Kölcsey’s Hymn, the poem that later became Hungary’s national anthem, on January 22, 1823.

ECUMENICAL PRAYER WEEK GETS UNDER WAY

Cardinal Péter Erdő, Hungary’s Catholic leader, stressed the importance of the “helping love” that binds Christians together and touches everyone, at the opening of an ecumenical week of prayer at Saint Stephen’s Basilica in Budapest on Sunday evening. Christians are united by the fact that they are all disciples of Christ and recognise Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest said. “And if we are his disciples, then we must follow his teachings,” he added.

Reformed Church Bishop József Steinbach, head of the Ecumenical Council of Hungarian Churches, said the introduction to the parable of the Good Samaritan, when a lawyer asks Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life, highlighted “that all of our problems ... stem from the fact that we have become separated from God and are mortal”.