

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Holocaust Remembrance Day

MTI/Tibor Illyés

UPCOMING EVENTS

Central European Fashion Week

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

SZIJJÁRTÓ TO EU: 'STOP THREATENING W BALKANS'

Péter Szijjártó, the foreign minister, has called on the European Union to cease "threatening and blackmailing" the Western Balkans to ensure a successful integration policy.

At the joint press conference with Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik held in Banja Luka on Friday, Szijjártó noted that a priority of Hungary's upcoming EU presidency would be to speed up the EU integration of the Western Balkans. He said the EU needed fresh impetus and ambitions, and the Western Balkans "can provide all this". The minister called on the EU to speak to the region "with a respectful voice" and take the will of the people of the region and the results of elections there seriously. Szijjártó said Hungary would continue to oppose any political leader elected in the Western Balkans from being placed on a sanctions list. Also, Hungary would oppose the withdrawal of development money as this would "punish the people living here", he added. Meanwhile, Hungary continues to support a scheme for agricultural enterprises of Republika Srpska in view of "responsible neighbourhood policy". The relevant companies must use the money under the scheme to buy equipment manufactured in Hungary, he noted, so Hungarians would also benefit.

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DEFMIN: SERBIA HUNGARY'S STRATEGIC PARTNER

Hungary's neighbour Serbia is a partner of strategic importance and the two countries are bound by a "serious friendship", the defence minister said after meeting his Serbian counterpart, Miloš Vučević, in Budapest on Friday, noting that they have established a working group for cooperation in the defence industry and for making joint defence procurements. Hungary is in a position to sell surplus assets to Serbia thanks to its continuous purchases of cutting-edge defence equipment, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky said. The working group now aims to expand cooperation to the manufacturing of defence equipment, he added. Vučević thanked the Hungarian government for its steady support for Serbia's EU integration. "We share values and believe in the same Europe ... A Europe that has traditions, values and so has a shared future," he said.

JUSTICE MIN: HUNGARY AGAINST LEGALISING PROMOTION OF PROSTITUTION

Hungary is against a European Union proposal under which the promotion of prostitution could be legalised, the justice minister said in Brussels on Thursday. The Hungarian government also refuses to support

another proposal aimed at holding inmates sentenced to prison for minor crimes in open prisons, the minister told Hungarian journalists on the sidelines of an informal meeting of his EU counterparts.

Concerning the former proposal, Tuzson said the promotion of prostitution was a criminal activity in Hungary, and the country could not support its decriminalization. Moreover, it certainly would not support prostitution becoming a licensed activity, he said, adding that no treaty between EU member states existed that could force Hungary adhere to such an EU decision.

"Some say organised crime could be better combatted if the organisation or promotion of prostitution were to be legalised ... we most firmly reject that approach," the minister said. Under the open prison proposal, minor offenders could be kept detained in "dwellings, in their own rooms" rather than in prisons, Tuzson said. The measure would "remove the actual punishment from the punishment ... therefore Hungary cannot support the initiative," he said.

"Hungary has a different penal policy; we want to put the victim in focus rather than the perpetrator," Tuzson said, noting the government's efforts to set up a network of help centres for victims of crime. "Hungary wants to make progress in the field of helping victims," he added. The Hungarian government supports the EU's proposals concerning organised crimes, especially drug-related crimes,

Tuzson said, urging an "effective and coordinated effort". "Hungary will support all efforts of this kind," he added.

FINMIN: BUDGET DEFICIT BELOW 3% LIKELY BY 2025

A budget deficit below 3% of GDP can be achieved by 2025, halving from last year's 6%, Mihály Varga, the finance minister, said in a radio interview on Thursday. Notwithstanding consecutive crises, weak consumption on the back of a drop in real wages which led to less tax revenues, the budget held its own, Varga told commercial broadcaster Inforádió. Boosting growth while keeping an eye on the fiscal balance is the government's focus, he said, noting that the budget could not be decoupled from the state of the economy, but the balance was constantly improving. He said that ensuring sustainable and stable economic growth depended on maintaining budgetary discipline. Pushing down the shortfall from 6% of GDP to 3% could not happen in a single year, and two years would be needed, Varga added.

RÉTVÁRI: BRUSSELS 'FAILING TO FOCUS ON STOPPING MIGRATION'

The central focus of the way Brussels continues to handle migration is managing instead of stopping it by protecting the external borders, Bence

Rétfári, state secretary at the interior ministry, told Hungarian journalists in Brussels on Thursday. Speaking after an EU meeting of interior ministers, Rétfári said "Brussels is still forcing through what has not worked so far".

According to Rétfári, the EU "is working to cement" details of the EU's Migration Pact adopted in December by passing nine regulations, including a rule on distributing illegal migrants across member states according to mandatory quotas. States that refuse to accommodate migrants would be fined, he added. Under another rule, 28.3% of all the asylum applications should be dealt with in Hungary, which would lead to the emergence of "migrant ghettos" at the Hungarian border, he said.

"It has been confirmed in Brussels that ... they want to drive further into the one-way street the EU entered in 2015," he said. "The EU is on the wrong path; they should instead be protecting the external borders and the European continent," Rétfári said. Rétfári said 99.3% of respondents to the latest government National Consultation public survey supported the statement that "Hungary should be protected from the emergence of migrant ghettos... So it's important that we keep opposing plans that have only led to failure so far," he added.

"It's obvious that Brussels insists on its own ill-advised decisions ... and it is not only like that in connection with migration but with the war in Ukraine, too," he said, adding that "the policy of sanctions has failed and

the whole of Europe is suffering from those sanctions... Still, they talk about success and achievements in Brussels," Rétfári said.

FIDESZ MEP MARKS HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

"Hatred and animosity cannot be a part of our life," Livia Járóka, MEP of Hungary's ruling Fidesz, told a commemoration in Brussels late on Thursday. The event, hosted by Járóka herself and Iván Tamás Kovács, Hungary's ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg, was held at the Liszt Institute to mark the 79th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Referring to Jews and Roma that were found alive when the camp was liberated, Járóka said "to them this day was not only of liberation, it also meant that they would then mourn for decades their lost beloved, and carry on the horrendous memory of people discriminated, deported, and killed because of their skin colour or religion". "It is a great honour for me that this day is not only marked by the Roma but by majority society, too," she said paying tribute to the victims of the Holocaust.

CSÁK ADDRESSES CHINESE NEW YEAR OPENING EVENT

Chinese and Hungarian people maintain a long-standing sympathy

and mutual respect, the minister of culture and innovation said, addressing the official opening event of the Chinese New Year in Budapest on Thursday. "It is a great pleasure that Hungary is the first country outside China where the Year of the Dragon is being marked, and the significance of the event is enhanced by the fact that the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Hungarian-Chinese diplomatic relations is marked this year," János Csák told the event. Chinese Minister of Culture and Tourism Sun Yeli said an increasing number of people around the world were celebrating Chinese New Year. Hungary and China maintain friendly relations and a partnership with each other, and the two countries trust each other, he added. Gong Tao, the Chinese ambassador in Budapest, expressed appreciation of Hungarian-Chinese exchange ties.

HUNGARY POPULATION 9,580,000 AT END-2023

Hungary's population stood at an estimated 9,580,000 at the end of 2023, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. The natural decrease of the population was 42,000 for the year, the difference between 85,200 live births and 127,200 deaths. The number of live births fell by 3.7% and the fertility rate slipped to 1.50% from 1.52%. The number of deaths dropped by 6.8%. Preliminary data show that in the month of December, 6,565 children were born and 11,727 people died,

with the number of births down 12% year on year, while deaths fell by 7.2%, and marriages by 4.1%.

HUNGARY DEC JOBLESS RATE 4.2%, EMPLOYMENT RATE UP

Hungary's jobless rate was 4.2% in December, level with November, the Central Statistical Office (KSH) said on Friday. The December rate for 15-74-year-olds was higher than 3.8% twelve months earlier. Fully 207,300 people were unemployed, 23,800 more than in the same month the previous year. The rolling three-month average jobless rate stood at 4.4% in December, up from 3.9% twelve months earlier. The monthly jobless rate for 15-64-year-olds was 4.2% in December, unchanged from November and up from 3.8% a year earlier. In December, the average number of employed aged between 15 and 74 increased by 21,000 to 4,723,000 compared with twelve months earlier. In the full year, the number of employed increased by 29,000 to 4,724,000, while the employment rate of 15-64 year olds was 74.8%, 0.4 percentage points higher than the previous year.

Commenting on the data, Sándor Czomba, the state secretary for employment policy, noted the record

high employment rate in the last quarter of 2023, with the activity rate of the 15-64 age group at a record high of 78.5%.

The number of jobholders has grown by 1 million people "since the Gyurcsány era", he said. Thanks to government measures to protect families and jobs through boosting employment rates, the number of jobseekers has fallen to a record low, he said. The record activity rate is another step towards the targeted 85%, Czomba said. The government is working to achieve a 4% of GDP, increase consumption and to keep investments above 25%, he added.

NATIONAL BUS TRADE UNION ANNOUNCES STRIKE FOR JAN 28-29

Solidarity, the trade union for bus employees, has announced a strike of workers of the national bus carrier Volánbusz, to take place on Jan 28-29. The employer MÁV-Volán group said the strike was "unnecessary" as wage talks are currently under way. In talks held earlier in January, MÁV-Volán offered a 25% wage hike between 2024 and 2026. Employees would get a blanket 70,000 forints (EUR 181) monthly raise in 2024, amounting to 16.8% on average, the statement said. Volánbusz is prepared to provide

necessary services during the strike, and keep over 70% of the buses on the roads, the statement said.

MORE THAN 8,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON THURSDAY

Fully 3,521 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Thursday, while 4,709 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 49 people, ORFK said on Friday.

METEOROLOGY: TEMPERATURE AND WIND RECORDS WERE BROKEN ON THURSDAY

Wind speed and daily minimum temperature records were broken in Hungary on Thursday, the national weather service HungaroMet said on its website. Wind speed of 110.5kmh were recorded on János Hill in Budapest, breaking 108.7kmh measured in Budapest in 1984. Meanwhile, minimum temperature high of 8°C was measured in Fertőrákos, in north-western Hungary, at dawn, breaking the previous record of 6.1°C measured in Pécs, in the south, in 1902.