

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



MTV/Édit: Kátai

The Háromszék Dance Company's performance inspired by paintings of Mihály Munkácsy

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**EU affairs ministers meet in Brussels**

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

## TOP STORY

# SZIJJÁRTÓ: ISRAEL HAS RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENCE

The Hungarian government stands with Israel and “we really want to see Europe standing up and recognising the right of Israel to protect itself,” Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in an interview with The Jerusalem Post published on Friday.

Hungary considers the Israeli army’s military campaign against Hamas an anti-terror operation, the success of which is in the interest of not just Israel, but the entire world, Szijjártó said. Hungary, he said, was one of the countries to object to South Africa’s petition accusing Israel of genocide in the Gaza Strip in front of the International Court of Justice in The Hague. He said the accusation was “nonsense”, adding that Hungary stood by Israel against any “unbalanced and unfair” international action.

Szijjártó said four Hungarian-Israeli citizens were among those taken hostage on October 7, and one died in the attack. Three of them have since been released, but a father of two is still being held in Gaza, he added.

Meanwhile, Szijjártó said Hungary was among the countries opposing EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell’s proposed resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. EU-Israel ties should not be contingent on a two-state solution, he said, arguing that Israel is only one party in the conflict which it cannot resolve on its own.

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## **SZIJJÁRTÓ: HUNGARY SIGNS COOPERATION ACTION PLAN WITH BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

Representatives of Hungary have signed a foreign policy cooperation action plan with Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at starting talks on its European integration, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Sarajevo on Friday. The foreign ministry quoted Szijjártó as telling a press conference held jointly with Bosnian counterpart Elmedin Konaković that Europe could gain “new momentum, new energies and ambition” through integrating the Western Balkans. “The European Union has at least as great an interest in your fast accession as you have in becoming members,” Szijjártó said, adding that the upcoming Hungarian EU presidency would see it as a top priority to “significantly” accelerate the Western Balkans integration process. He also said that fast integration of the region could result in “stability and calm” in its countries. “All those slowing down the integration of the Western Balkans are working against security in the EU and the interests of the Western Balkans,” the minister added.

The EUFOR ALTHEA mission has recently been taken over by a Hungarian commander and the troops include 264 Hungarian soldiers, he added. On the subject of bilateral ties, Szijjártó said the two countries had

built close cooperation in recent years, with bilateral trade turnover breaking a record 600 million euros.

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## **FINMIN: STRICT FISCAL POLICY NEEDED FURTHER TO PUSH AVG INFLATION BELOW 5%**

The government’s strict fiscal policy should be continued to push average annual inflation below 5%, the finance minister told a conference on Saturday. In his speech at the iCon economic policy conference in Sopron, in north-west Hungary, Mihály Varga said that inflation fell to 5.5% in December from 25.7% in January 2023. In monetary policy, “the time has come for yields and the base rate to decline.” The government also aims to bring deficit down from 6% to 3%, possibly over 2 years to avoid adverse consequences on growth and unemployment, he said. This year, deficit is expected to be in the 4-4.5% range, he added. Meanwhile, EU funds worth some 520 billion forints (EUR 134.5m) have been disbursed to Hungary since December, his ministry cited Varga as saying. The government is expecting another 2,500 billion forints in 2024, he added.

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## **HUNGARY PUBLIC MEDIA VOICES SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT POLISH PUBLIC MEDIA**

The Hungarian public media stands by Poland’s independent public media, Dániel Papp, the head of

Hungary’s Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA), and Anita Altorjai, the head of public media service provider Duna Médiaszolgáltató, said in a letter to the leaders of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) on Thursday. In their letter to EBU President Delphine Ernotte-Cunci and Director-General Noel Curran, Papp and Altorjai cited reports of Poland’s public media having become the “prisoners” of the Polish government even despite rulings by the Polish constitutional court.

They expressed MTVA and Duna Médiaszolgáltató’s “deep concern” over the “everyday political intervention” against Poland’s independent public media.

Papp and Altorjai said they trusted that joint efforts would steer the actions of the Polish government in connection with the public media within an appropriate constitutional and democratic framework. They said the procedure to shut down Polish public media had put it in an uncertain situation and was also harmful to Polish society.

Given the legal irregularities found by Poland’s constitutional court, they said the Hungarian public media was asking the EBU to put the case of the Polish public media on its agenda and express its objection to the treatment of the public media if it finds that the Polish government’s actions go against the EBU’s norms.

They said Hungarian public media respected the decisions of Poland’s legally elected government, but

warned decision-makers against structural and personnel changes that lack democratic debate and consultations with all stakeholders. They stressed that the process of appointing public media leaders was key to ensuring that the public media is able to operate independently. They also asked the EBU's leaders to use all the tools at the organisation's disposal to take steps in the interest of the Polish public media's independence.

### **SZALAY-BOBROVNICZKY MARKS INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY**

A "new Jewish renaissance" is under way in Hungary, and the Hungarian state is proud of being a part of it, the defence minister said on Friday, marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Hungarians are paying respect to the victims of a European tragedy that Hungary was part of, Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky told an event at the Holocaust Memorial Centre, adding that "we are remembering our own people". Neither should the heroes who endeavoured to rescue the persecuted at the risk of their own lives be forgotten, he said, referring to Raoul Wallenberg, Sára Salkaházi, Gábor Sztéhlo and Ferenc Koszorus.

Noting today's "difficult times", he said there were "cracks in the institution of international security", with a war in Hungary's neighbourhood and a recent attack

against the Jewish state. "A new type of anti-Semitism has reared its head in the free world," the minister said. Jewish communities have come under pressure and Molotov cocktails have been thrown at synagogues, he added. Hungary has been baselessly accused of anti-Semitism despite the fact that "this country is a safe place for Jews", he said. "Peace requires strength and Hungary must be strong enough to protect its citizens", he added.

### **JUDIT VARGA HAS TALKS IN DÜSSELDORF**

Judit Varga, the head of parliament's European affairs committee, had talks with political and economic leaders of North Rhine-Westphalia on Friday. The German province is "a crucial investment and trade partner" for Hungary, Varga told MTI after the talks. She said economic ties were good but needed to be further developed. She added that preserving and developing German-Hungarian and North Rhine-Westphalian-Hungarian ties would fit in the priorities of Hungary's upcoming European Union presidency.

Varga met Stefan Engstfeld, her counterpart in the province's parliament, and other local officials. During her talks, Varga discussed "practical areas where the EU could have a better performance and where it could set more rationalistic goals for the industry, which could be met and which are not ideologically motivated," she said. The talks touched upon the EU's general economic state, priorities

of the Hungarian presidency and the European parliamentary elections.

Varga noted Europe's "crisis signals" including protests by farmers "demonstrating that German and French citizens have realised that the Brussels elite neglects their problems," which she said "should be remedied through the EP elections".

Concerning media reports suggesting that the EU could strip Hungary of its voting rights, Varga said "the EU treaties guarantee Hungary the right for a different opinion in certain areas such as foreign policy". "Unless we promote the majority position, we are threatened by fund cuts and the stripping of our voting rights ... this is a kind of cancel culture in the Brussels administration, which we want to change by all means," she said. In the upcoming election "redirecting Europe to the path of rationality and restoring consensus in decision making will be on one side, and witch hunts, rule of law procedures, and blackmailing countries of a different opinion on the other," she insisted.

### **GOVT OFFICIAL: HUNGARY HELPS AGENCY OPENS FIRST AFRICAN REPRESENTATIVE OFFICE**

The Hungary Helps agency opened its first staffed representative office in Africa two weeks ago, in N'Djamena, the capital city of Chad, state secretary for the aid of persecuted Christians and the Hungary Helps Program said. Tristan Azbej told a conference

dubbed Synergy between the EU and the Sub-Sahara region organised by the Sustainable Development Knowledge Centre that Hungarians owe solidarity and responsibility for Africa and its people. The Hungarian government recognised the significance of the continent ten years ago and launched its policy of opening to the south, he added.

Commenting on the Hungary Helps programme, he said Hungarian donations had been sent to more than 50 countries, 18 of which were in the Sub-Sahara region. Diplomatic presence is currently being increased in the region because Hungary wants to catch up on delays in the opening to the south scheme. Compared to two Hungarian diplomatic representative offices in the Sub-Sahara region in 2010, there are currently seven, he added.

Azbej announced at the event that the Hungary Helps Agency was inviting applications for Hungarian civil organisations to support their humanitarian and development activities in Africa. Commenting on the war conflicts in the Sahel, he said that if the region “fails and falls into chaos”, some 100 million refugees might set off, causing migratory pressure in Europe.

Concerning the tasks of the new representative office in N’Djamena, he said Hungary follows the principle that the help offered is based on direct personal relations, and the office will seek to assess the demands of the people that need help.

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## **NOVÁK HONOURS REFORMED BISHOP KATÓ**

President Katalin Novák has awarded the Hungarian Order of Merit, Grand Cross, civil division, to Reformed Bishop Béla Kató, of the Reformed Diocese of Transylvania, the head of the board of the Sapientia Foundation, on Friday. In his laudation at the ceremony, Bishop Zoltán Balog referred to Kató as “a guideline to Catholics and Protestants, to all Christian communities seeking to preserve their Hungarian identity.” The ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, House Speaker László Kövér, and Gergely Gulyás, the head of the PM’s Office.

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## **TOROCZKAI CALLS FOR ‘FINDING PARTNERS IN ANTI-GLOBALISM FIGHT’**

László Toroczkai, the head of the radical Mi Hazánk party, said the party needed to “find partners in our fight against globalism” at the party’s year-closing event in Budapest on Saturday. Mi Hazánk’s task is to “take over governance in our own country and ultimately in Brussels.” “Once we’ve won, we will have to decide what to do about the European Union,” Toroczkai added. The EU should be run as a federation of sovereign countries or abolished and cooperation left to bilateral agreements, he said.

In the future, Toroczkai said Hungary had three roads to choose from. He said one was promoted by left-liberal

parties, “tantamount to a betrayal of the homeland and the nation, because those forces want a United States of Europe, without self-governance and the freedom rights of nations and European citizens”. “Those forces ... have pushed Ukraine into a war that is about to ruin Europe and floor its economy,” he said, calling for immediate ceasefire and peace talks. Hungary could also choose “the crooked path of Fidesz”, he said. He slammed the ruling parties’ foreign policy as “incomprehensible”. Further, he said the ruling party’s “only economic innovation is to turn the country into a battery superpower, he said. Mi Hazánk, on the other hand, is steadfast in choosing its partners and ready to find new ones. “We do not need to provoke Islam but to stop migration and the influx of guest workers.” The event was also attended by Petr Bystron, a MP of the Alternative für Deutschland party, Thierry Baudet of The Netherland’s Forum for Democracy, and Stanislav Stoianov of the Bulgarian Rebirth party and Gustav Kasselstrand of the Alternative for Sweden party.

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## **DONÁTH ELECTED HEAD OF MOMENTUM**

The Momentum party assembly elected MEP Anna Donáth head of the party on Sunday. In her speech to the assembly, Donáth said Momentum was a “liberal, freedom-loving party with an unshakeable belief in human dignity.” She said

she was proud to lead Momentum, “a community ready to serve and to stand up to those wanting to rule others, to corruption”. “We have the task of bursting the populists’ balloon.” Regarding the local and European parliamentary elections in 2024, Donáth said Momentum would support all “acceptable” joint opposition candidates and propose a primary election where there is no agreement. She said she was initiating talks with the opposition parties.

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### **FIDESZ CALLS ON MOMENTUM MAYOR TO TAKE STANCE ON EU HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES**

Fidesz politicians have called on Tamás Soproni, the mayor of Budapest’s 6th district, to openly back or reject his Momentum party’s stance on European Union funding for higher education and research programmes. MEP Tamás Deutsch and Balázs Norbert Kovács, the

head of Fidesz’s 6th district division, said in an open letter on Sunday that, “at the shameful initiative of Momentum MEPs Anna Donáth and Katalin Cseh”, the leftist majority of the European Parliament decided to “uphold the unlawful infringement of the rights of Hungarian students, researchers and professors” as they remain excluded from EU higher education and research development programmes.

Soproni, the only Momentum member serving as a mayor and a member of the party board, should make it clear whether he stands by the “shameful and gravely discriminative stance” or rejects it, Deutsch and Kovács said. They also called on Soproni to forego “parroting ... dollar left mantras” on concerns about the rule of law. “Supposing but not allowing that those concerns were based on fact, stripping Hungarian students, professors and researchers of participation in the Erasmus+ and Horizon programmes remains unlawful,” the open letter said.

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### **WIZZ AIR TO RELAUNCH BUDAPEST-CHISINAU SERVICE**

Hungary’s low-cost airline Wizz Air will restart its flights between Budapest and Chişinău in March, the company told MTI in statement on Friday. The carrier will operate two flights a week to Moldova. Wizz Air will also restart its flights to Chişinău from Venice’s International Marco Polo Airport, the statement said.

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### **MORE THAN 10,000 UKRAINIAN CITIZENS ENTER HUNGARY ON SATURDAY**

Fully 4,405 Ukrainian citizens entered Hungary at the Ukraine-Hungary border on Saturday, while 5,864 came to the country via Romania, according to the national police headquarters (ORFK). Police issued temporary residence permits valid for 30 days to 31 people, ORFK said on Sunday.