

PHOTO OF THE DAY



Asian black bear in the Győr zoo

MTI/Csaba Krizsán

UPCOMING EVENTS

EU foreign ministers hold informal meeting in Brussels

Events related to the wars in Ukraine, Israel

TOP STORY

HUNGARY 'INSISTS IT WON'T SEND ARMS TO UKRAINE'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview on Friday that he had held successful talks at the European Union summit in Brussels the previous day, and Hungary maintained its position that it would not send weapons to Ukraine.

Orbán told public radio that Hungary only allowed financial contributions towards efforts to prevent the collapse of the Ukrainian state. Brussels should focus all its efforts on peace and aim towards achieving a ceasefire as soon as possible, followed by peace talks, he added. Orbán said the 50 billion euros approved for Ukraine would not pay for weapons but for the running of the Ukrainian state. The Ukrainian economy, he said, had "essentially collapsed". "I believe that time is on the Russians' side ... and power relations will not improve to Ukraine's advantage," he said. "Why pursue the war in that case? It's the decision of Ukrainians because it's their country and they want to make war," Orbán said. He said that had EU member states been unable to reach an agreement, the 26 remaining states may have agreed on the funds needed for the running of the Ukrainian state and taken "our money away ... and sent it to Ukraine". He said the EU summit had ended successfully because an agreement was reached ensuring that "money cannot be taken away" from Hungary.

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ORBÁN: HUNGARIAN LEFT WING 'PRO-WAR'

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview on Friday that the Hungarian left wing was "pro-war", and they "always want to agree with Brussels" on how Hungary should take part in the war. "I always strive to come to an agreement with Brussels on how this should not happen," he added. "How they managed to get from five thousand helmets to F16s over two years is a one-million-dollar question," Orbán said. He added that it was a natural psychological process that when someone started supporting something small-scale, they would identify with the supported side.

Orbán said he had noticed in Brussels that after some time, people started talking about "our war" and "Ukrainians fighting for us". "This is a total misconception," he said, adding that "in the German press there is world-war atmosphere". "It is obvious that the Russians cannot even defeat Ukraine for the time being, so how could they go against the whole of NATO?" he said.

Orbán said "absurd arguments" were being made, and people found it difficult to accept that what they had started had gone in the wrong direction and changes were needed. He said the voice of those fostering stronger relations with the United States was getting louder in the European Union. The viewpoints of

Brussels and America, he added, had got mixed up. Decisions in Brussels, he said, "often follow American interests rather than European ones".

"One thing's certain: there will only be peace when things change in Brussels," the prime minister said. In December, they "fought for the monies due to Hungary", Orbán said, adding that Hungary had now "received a guarantee" that disbursements would not stop and the funds would not be sent to Ukraine.

"I would be very surprised if this agreement weren't fulfilled," he said. The prime minister said that when it came to disputes, both Brussels and Hungary had "tools in their hands". "True, the size of our tools differ -- they are 26 countries -- and if there is no agreement they can damage us, but the damage we can cause them would also be unpleasant," he said. "Everyone would like to avoid this," he added.

"I went as far as I could, to the wall," Orbán said. Had Hungary used its veto, the other 26 countries would have come to an agreement and sent the money to Ukraine, even taking Hungarians' money away and giving it to Ukraine," he added. This would have entailed "huge conflicts which everyone wanted to avoid", he said. "Eventually, a good solution was found: Hungary isn't sending weapons to Brussels, the country will receive its money from Brussels, and will contribute to the civilian maintenance of Ukraine," he added.

ORBÁN: EU TREATING FARMERS 'UNFAIRLY'

It is unfair on European farmers that "Brussels has introduced regulations that make production increasingly expensive while allowing the import of produce from countries where the rules do not apply," Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said. Orbán told public radio that Ukrainian agricultural products should not be allowed to enter the European market under the current conditions, "though it would be best not to allow them at all". Orbán said the farmers were protesting because they felt their voice was not being heard. Their only means to change this "is to stand in the squares, blare their horns and fight the police," he said.

The prime minister said there had been a strenuous debate about this issue at the EU leaders summit, and several leaders had called on the European Commission not to allow Ukrainian agricultural imports. He added that he had met farmers demonstrating in Brussels, and they asked the Poles, the Slovaks and Hungarians to block Ukrainian shipments at the border of Europe.

"It's not without reason there's a sense that Brussels often represents someone else's interests rather than European interests," Orbán said, adding that the same feeling emerged in Hungary's parliament. "When it comes to the issue of weapons for Ukraine, for instance, [there is the sense that]

the Hungarian left wing is financed from abroad," the prime minister said. "Those who are giving them the money are all pro-war," Orbán said, insisting that the money was donated with the purpose of involving Hungary in the war through the left wing. In Brussels, too, "you can often see that they represent the interests of the other side", he said. "If there is too big a distance between voters and leaders, the leaders will be sent off," he said, adding that Hungarians would soon have a chance to take part in the European parliamentary elections in June.

Reflecting on the meeting of Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, earlier this week, Orbán noted that Kuleba had called Orbán and Szijjártó "pro-Hungary, not pro-Russia". Orbán said Hungary was a sovereign country, and as such, was "not interested in the Ukrainian opinion". "We don't need a kosher label from Ukraine."

Hungary's foreign policy will represent the interests of Hungarians equally against Ukraine, Russia and the US, he said. As regards Hungary-Ukraine relations, Orbán reiterated that Hungary supported Ukraine in terms of peace, though Transcarpathian Hungarians had been "deprived of their rights since 2015 in a way reminiscent of old communist times". "Chances for a change after Thursday's EU summit are better, though this has yet to be implemented," he added.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: 'BIG HUNGARIAN WIN' AT EU SUMMIT

The European Union summit in Brussels on Thursday brought about "a big win" for Hungary, and the government "achieved all of its goals", the minister of foreign affairs and trade said on Friday. Speaking after a meeting of ministers of the Association of South-East Asian Nations and the EU, Péter Szijjártó said the government had ensured that "monies Hungary is entitled to under the European treaties, which are being withheld unlawfully, will not land in Ukraine."

"By taking part in the decision-making process, we had the opportunity to prevent Hungary's frozen funding from landing in Ukraine. We also won acceptance of a control mechanism to ensure that the funds are spent according to the agreement, and that the European Commission reports on that to the EU Council." The resources, he added, would be used to run the Ukrainian state, thereby helping its people, and not for weapon deliveries.

Responding to a question on the EU hiking resources earmarked for weapon deliveries to Ukraine, Szijjártó said Hungary "continues to oppose the measure and will stay away from such decisions, but won't obstruct others in deciding otherwise."

"We won't be part of such a decision or take on political or financial burdens because of it." Regarding the 500 million euros withheld from

the European Peace Facility due to Hungary's concerns, Szijjártó said that even though it had always been referred to as being very important for Ukraine, the issue had not been raised during his visit to Uzhhorod or during his meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba.

"This is only important for EU countries that have decided to deliver weapons to Ukraine and are now looking to have their deliveries paid for by European citizens," he said. Hungary rejected the disbursement because Ukraine had subjected OTP, a Hungarian bank, to "unfair treatment", he noted.

"I asked my Ukrainian colleagues to ensure a fair environment for Hungarian companies operating in Ukraine that are also key to the Hungarian economy," he said. Regarding Hungary's ratification of Sweden's NATO membership, Szijjártó said Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson would be acting "decently and fairly" if he came to Hungary ahead of the parliamentary vote.

SZIJJÁRTÓ: EUROPE NEEDS INVESTMENT FROM THE EAST

The European Union is in great need of investments and trade from the East, and if the community hinders them, its global economic weight will lessen, the minister of foreign affairs and trade said in Brussels on Friday. The ministry cited Péter Szijjártó telling a press conference after the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum that in

recent years, the centre of gravity in the global economy had shifted from West to East. Whereas in the past, some 70-80% of global investment was financed from Western capital and the remaining 20-30% from Eastern capital, this proportion has since turned around, he said.

Eastern and Western companies depend on each other more than ever before. "Some view this as a negative development, but I think it is good and positive," he added. "It is very important that in this new era, Europe should find the right responses because if bad responses are given to this new reality, they will cause much more severe problems in terms of the economy," he said.

He said Europe needed investments and trade from the East, especially considering the fact that the electronic transition in the car industry, a crucially important sector of the economy, would be impossible without Asian suppliers. "If Europe barricades itself from Eastern investment and puts up barriers to trade with the East, then the European Union will further lose its economic significance," he said, adding that China had already overtaken the EU in terms of GDP. He confirmed that the Hungarian government would make further steps during Hungary's upcoming EU presidency towards connectivity, and plans to speed up free trade talks with southeast Asian states including Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.

"While we in Europe were tied up in our problems and outdated,

ideologically forced disputes, one of the world's largest free trade regions has been set up in South-East Asia," he said.

Countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) provide 29% of global GDP, and "it is therefore in the European Union's interest to develop the closest possible cooperation with this free trade region", he said. The minister said that if the EU wanted to sign free trade agreements "with the intent of political and ideological lecturing", then partners would obviously not enter the agreement.

He praised the success of Hungary's policy of opening to the East. Had the government yielded to "pressure and attempts to discourage us", Hungary would have lost out on some great opportunities, considering that the largest investments in the past ten years arrived from China and South Korea, he added.

Trade between Hungary and South-East Asian countries increased by 75% in the past ten years, and investments from the region helped the Hungarian economy's shift to a higher gear and guarantee the maintenance of its growth path. "Hungary is living proof that East-West cooperation indeed has great advantages," he added.

SZILI MEETS US HUNGARIANS IN WASHINGTON

The policy on Hungarian communities abroad unites all Hungarians living in the Carpathian

Basin and the diaspora, Katalin Szili, the prime ministerial commissioner for Carpathian Basin autonomy affairs, said in Washington, DC on Thursday. Meeting representatives of around fifteen local Hungarian organisations at the Hungarian embassy, Szili noted the government has declared 2024 the year of national cooperation in light of the fact that policies for Hungarian communities abroad were launched a decade and a half ago. Szili cited the National Virtual Space initiative, through which Hungarians living anywhere in the world will be able to follow the broadcasts of Hungary's public media, as an example of how policies were been "fine-tuned".

Szili briefed representatives of the Hungarian organisations about the situation of Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin, including demographic changes, noting that the demographic composition of Transcarpathia was undergoing a transformation as a consequence of the Ukrainian population fleeing to Transcarpathia from eastern Ukraine due to the war.

Szili said the Hungarian government has spent 1,300 billion forints since 2010 on investments in 5,500 cultural and education institutions in the framework of policies for Hungarian communities abroad. Ildikó Pataki, the regional president for North America of the Diaspora Council, elected last November, introduced herself and spoke about her plans to involve young people in the activities of

the Hungarian diaspora. During her two-day visit to Washington, DC, Szili attended the National Prayer Breakfast, where she met members of Congress, Republican House Representatives and Senators and discussed issues of identity of values, as well as possibilities for peace in Ukraine.

CEE, BALTIC STATES SIGN 3 SEAS HYDROGEN COUNCIL COOPERATION AGREEMENT

Representatives of nine central and eastern European and Baltic states, Hungary among them, signed the cooperation agreement of the 3 Seas Hydrogen Council in Paris on Thursday, aiming to develop the region's hydrogen sector. Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine signed the agreement at the sector's largest conference, Hyvolution, the Hungarian Hydrogen Technology Association said.

The association said the aim was to explore and use opportunities to speed up the transition to hydrogen as an energy resource, aiding the fulfilment of zero-emissions goals. Association head István Lepsényi said signatories would work to ensure fair distribution of EU funding in central and eastern Europe. He said he hoped the agreement would support regional funding, cooperation in the sector and the development of competitive green energy.

HUNGARIAN INITIATIVE RESULTS IN REVISED EU DIRECTIVE ON HONEY LABELLING

European Union rules on honey labelling will change to indicate the countries of origin of blends and their shares as a result of a Hungarian initiative, Minister of Agriculture István Nagy said on Thursday. Nagy noted that Hungary had proposed the change in November 2019. The European Parliament and the Council reached political agreement on the revised directive on mandatory origin labelling for honey on Wednesday.

CHINA 'VERY IMPORTANT PARTNER', SAYS MINISTER AT LAUNCH OF YEAR OF DRAGON STAMP

China is "a very important partner" for Hungary, Márton Nagy, the economy minister, said at the launch of a Year of Dragon stamp, marking Chinese New Year on Thursday. The minister said he trusted that bilateral cooperation would continue to develop this year and surpass the success of 2023.

Fully 380 Chinese companies employ 16,000 people in Hungary, and China brought the largest volume of FDI to Hungary in 2023, he noted. Gong Tao, China's ambassador to Budapest, noted that this year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Hungarian-Chinese diplomatic relations. "In the Chinese calendar,

2024 is the Year of the Dragon with the dragon symbolising luck and power for the Chinese people," the ambassador noted.

LÁZÁR: 'HIGHLY IMPORTANT' RMDSZ PERFORMS WELL IN ROMANIA ELECTIONS

A Hungarian government official on Friday stressed the "great importance" of the ethnic Hungarian RMDSZ party performing well in this year's European Parliament, local government and general elections, and resuming its place in the Romanian government. The Hungarian government would not interfere with "how Transylvania Hungarians define their own future" but it offered its help, János Lázár, the construction and transport minister, told maszol.ro in a video interview. "Hungarians must grasp that we can't vote in their place... Everyone must go and vote if they want to protect their national interests," Lázár said.

KTK: 'FOREIGN-FUNDED LEFT ATTACKING NATL CONSULTATION SURVEY'

"No matter what methods are used to attack the National Consultation survey and the government's position, the government maintains that it does not want war, immigration or gender propaganda in schools," the Government Information Centre (KTK) said on Friday in reaction to complaints filed against the public survey. "The left-

wing politicians and activists who have filed complaints against the National Consultation are the same ones who, with their funding from abroad, have made it clear dozens of times that they are not looking out for Hungary's interests," the office said in a statement. They said the "foreign-funded left" supported weapons deliveries and the European Union's migration pact, and wanted to scrap Hungary's child protection law. "We stand by the position that only the Hungarian people can decide on their own future," KTK said, adding that this was supported by the results of the government's survey.

ELECTION COMMITTEE APPROVES LMP REFERENDUM BID ON PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

The National Election Committee (NVB) has approved a referendum bid submitted by opposition LMP which aims to scrap provisions in the Hungarian law on construction which allow priority investments to be fast-tracked, the party's deputy

group leader said on Thursday. LMP, which unsuccessfully launched the referendum bid last summer, had turned to the Kúria, Hungary's supreme court, which overruled the NVB's decision to reject the bid. Antal Csárdi told a press conference that in principle all obstacles to holding a referendum on the issue had been removed, and additional rights given to companies making priority investments would be struck down. If no one appeals the decision within the next two weeks, LMP will start gathering signatures at the end of February, he said. "If all goes to plan", the referendum could be held in the autumn, Csárdi said. The referendum aims to ensure that investments "that could ruin the residential environment and make everyday life impossible" would not be made without consulting locals, he said.

FILM DIRECTOR LÁSZLÓ VITÉZY DIES AGED 83

Renowned film director and producer László Vitézy has died at the age of

83, his son said on Facebook on Friday. Born in 1940, Vitézy's early films explored the reality behind the facade of Socialism. Peacetime (Békeidő, 1979), featuring the life of the head of a producers' cooperative in a village with dwindling population, is reported to have reached 1.5 million people despite censorship. Other films included The Unveiling (Leleplezés, 1979), Red Earth (Vörös föld, 1982) and Reformgondolatok, 1984.

Later in life, he adapted three of author Zsigmond Móricz's works for the screen, as well as films like Black Burdock (A fekete bojtar, 2015), The Actress (A színésznő, 2017) and The Singer (Az énekesnő, 2022). He was awarded the Balázs Béla Prize in 1980, the Sára-Csoóri Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2021, and the Kossuth Prize in 2023. His works attracted numerous awards: among them he received the Grand Prize of the Mannheim Film Festival for Peacetime in 1980 and the award for best television film director at the Los Angeles Hungarian Film Festival in 2018.